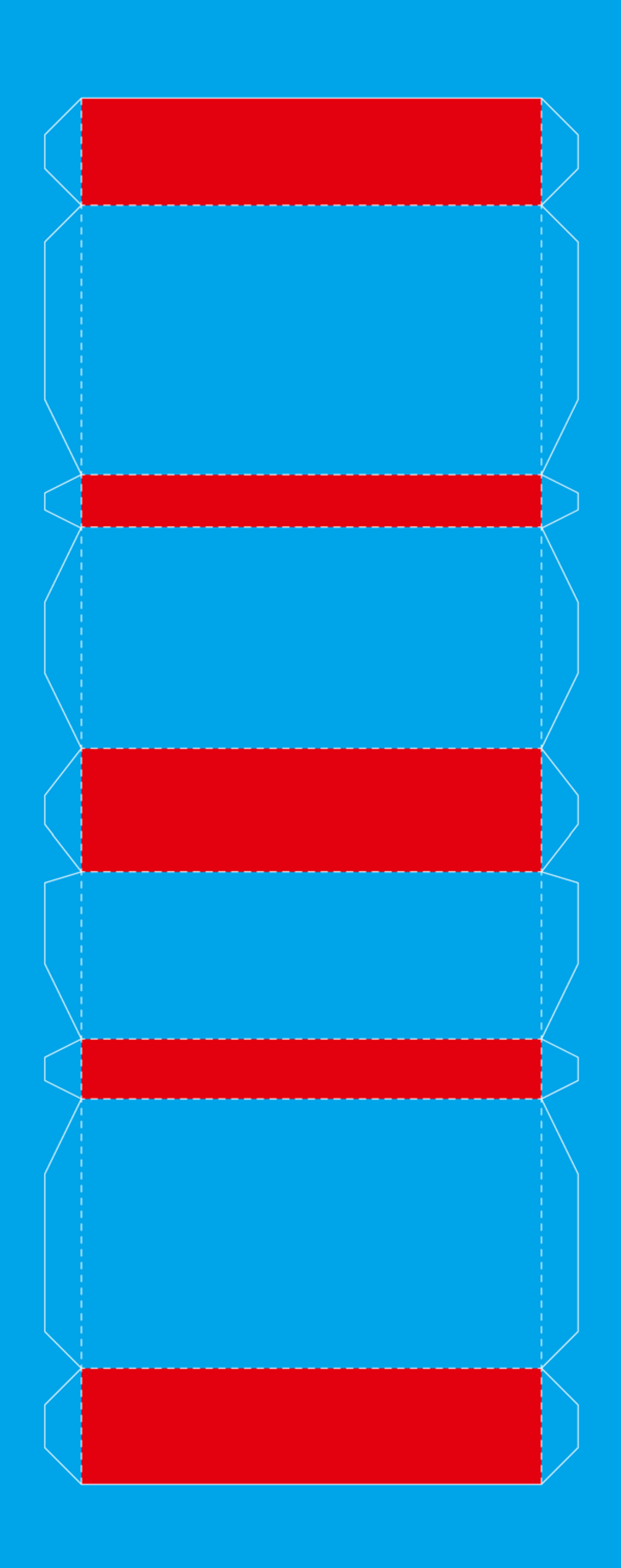

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E3 SPECIAL FEATURING PORTAL 2, LBP2,
KILLZONE 3, ZELDA: SKYWARD SWORD AND
PLAYSTATION MOVE VS XBOX 360 KINECT





What was the game of the show? What was the biggest surprise? Did Activision *really* spend $5m on its party? Those are the usual questions that greet you upon your return from E3 nowadays. This year, though, one query preceded all others, always accompanied by an eager, optimistic, slightly child-like grin: "So, is Nintendo's 3DS as good as everyone says?"

The answer is yes, it is, to the point that nothing else came close to making a similar impact during the three-day run of 2010's Electronic Entertainment Expo.

The key to the success of 3DS at E3 was that no one really expected Nintendo to pull it off. There was bound to be a compromise, it was said. It'd be a halfway-house kind of thing – not true stereoscopic 3D but some sort of workaround. And yet it came through on all counts. It's even going to get a remixed version of *Ocarina Of Time*. How could anyone fail to be entranced by this console?

Success at E3 isn't just about having the right product, though; it's also about gauging mood. And it's easy to get it wrong. As we're being ushered into LA's Galen Center for Microsoft's much-trumpeted Kinect event just prior to E3, for example, our internal danger alarm begins to tingle as we encounter a desk from which we're told to collect white nylon ponchos (replete with protusive shoulder pads) that should be worn for the duration of the evening's "experience". "Are these mandatory?" we ask, confirming an appropriate level of uptight Britishness to anyone within earshot. Our helper pauses a moment to weigh up the question before replying: "They're… one size fits all." Is it possible that things can go downhill from here? Oh, yes.

Fortunately, the remainder of our E3 experience is more positive. Our report, featuring interviews with the men behind Nintendo's 3DS, Microsoft's Kinect and Sony's worldwide game studios, begins on p8, while this issue's Hype section (see p25) is filled with notable games from LA.

On p118 we're joined by a new columnist in the form of Clint Hocking. Make him welcome, eh? And look out for some more changes in the magazine soon.



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Printed in the UK by William Gibbons.
Covers printed by Grange, Brighton, East Sussex.
Distributed in the UK by Seymour Distribution Ltd
2 East Poultry Avenue, London, EC1A 9PT.
(0207 429 4000)

"Hey, kid, what'd you do, jump ship?"



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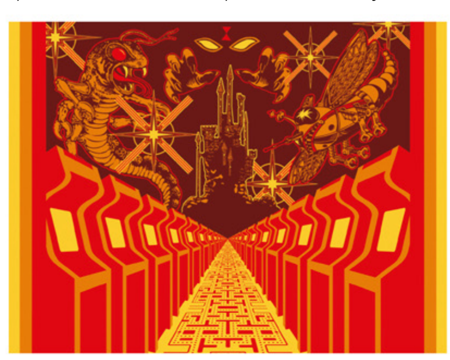
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EVENT

All eyes on 3DS at E3

At a gaming event not short on big-name announcements and demos, Nintendo takes the lead with a unique piece of hardware

Like so many memorable E3s, this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo, held in Los Angeles from June 15–17, features the official debut of a new *Zelda* game. At Nintendo's press conference the company's creative chief Shigeru Miyamoto helps to open proceedings by taking to the stage to demonstrate *The Legend Of Zelda: Skyward Sword*, a MotionPlus-enabled adventure with painterly backdrops across which Link can make use of a suite of abilities, some old, some new, and all realised via motion control.

The shadow of the upcoming 3DS has cast everything into shade, and no demo reel of GoldenEye, Golden Sun: Dark Dawn or Metroid: Other M can make a difference

Unlike E3s past featuring *Zelda* reveals, however, the audience hasn't come to see *Skyward Sword*. The shadow of the company's upcoming 3DS console has cast everything else into shade, and no demo reel of *GoldenEye*, *Golden Sun: Dark Dawn* or *Metroid: Other M* can make a difference. Nor can a live demo of *Epic Mickey* hosted by designer Warren Spector, even if he's turned out for the occasion in one of his finest tank tops, or the news that Retro Studios is resurrecting an old Rare property in the form of *Donkey Kong Country Returns*. All of these things draw applause and occasional whoops from the audience, but they are just appetisers.

The main course is a modest-looking piece of new portable hardware held aloft by Nintendo president Satoru Iwata, who claims that the stereoscopic-display 3DS is a natural evolution for the company that brought the world the first 3D game in the form of *Super Mario 64*. Some may contest his assertion that Mario's 64bit adventure deserves the label, and it is a surprise to all that the new hardware looks so similar to its all-conquering DS predecessors, but then Nintendo has never been about over-the-top stylings, and only rarely has it strayed into gimmickry, as it did with the launch of the innovative but impractical Virtual Boy.

The concern around the auditorium is that this new 3D system will under-deliver too, and such







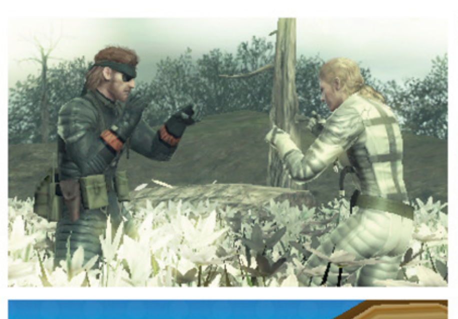
With a resolution of 800x240, the upper screen is where the magic happens, although most games will use the lower screen in tandem, just like DS titles. Two cameras allow users to record 3D imagery, while a slider smoothly emphasises/eliminates 3D effects in accordance to preference. The 'Slide Pad', meanwhile, works a treat for *PilotWings Resort*







Clockwise from top left: Satoru Iwata emerges from the wings with Nintendo's latest handheld; Reggie Fils-Aime brings on the girls; Shigeru Miyamoto puts Link through his paces in *Skyward Sword*












Just a handful of 3DS games currently in production: (clockwise from top left): *Metal Gear Solid: Snake Eater 3D, Nintendogs + Cats, PilotWings Resort, The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time 3D, Ridge Racer, Kid Icarus: Uprising, Mario Kart, Paper Mario* and *Animal Crossing*. As well as having strong thirdparty support, it's clear that Nintendo is using 3DS to resurrect some old favourites, and the hardware's 'Slide Pad' will no doubt be key in easing the transition

Q&A: **Hideki Konno** Manager/producer, Software Development Group No. 1, Nintendo EAD

Hideki Konno has enjoyed an incredible career creating games at Nintendo, with stellar titles such as *Super Mario Kart* and *Yoshi's Island* on his CV. He is, in short, something of a legend. Who better, then, to lead the team behind something as groundbreaking as 3DS?

How do you feel about the reaction to 3DS so far?
Consumers can't see the real surprise without the 3DS in front of them – cool footage isn't enough – but yesterday I went to our booth [at E3] and found consumers being surprised, saying: "Wow!" I was relieved to see those reactions.

Which came first, the idea or the technology?
Good question. Regarding 3D, this wasn't our first approach – we experimented in the NES era 15 years ago. During the NES era in Japan, with the Famicom, we released glasses that enabled 3D, and after that we experimented with the Virtual Boy. During the NES experiment with 3D, Miyamoto and Iwata were programmers experimenting with it, and I was watching them trying their best to realise 3D. We were constantly going back-and-forth on whether we could do it. Even in the GameCube era, when I was developing *Luigi's Mansion*, we experimented with having an additional display, a panel, to attach to the screen in order to enable 3D effects. At that time, because of the high cost of the 3D panels and the low resolution of the game, it wouldn't show 3D sufficiently, but we hoped that some day the technology would support 3D. Upon observing the latest technology we became confident that we could finally bring it to our handheld systems.

The Virtual Boy experiment wasn't a successful one, so was there nervousness about revisiting 3D within Nintendo?
We did hear doubtful voices. We weren't completely successfully with VB so there was a suspicious tone within the company. First, I introduced the latest technology – the 3D panel – attached it to the Wii and showed a demo showing *Mario Kart Wii* and *Animal Crossing*. In Japan there's a maxim: a glance is better than a hundred words. Even with words I wasn't able to convince anyone. So I presented the demo to Miyamoto and Iwata and they were stunned and agreed to take it in that direction.



How do you market something that has to be seen in action in order to be truly appreciated?
We are constantly discussing how to market the product. Our internal PR departments are saying that we should use cinema advertising, because cinemas are capable of showing 3D movies. But our key point with 3DS is that you don't need glasses, which you obviously need to use in cinemas. So we think regular marketing and promotional activities will be very tricky for us. I think that a lot of awareness about 3DS will be spread by word of mouth.

How important is it that 3DS is seen as an evolution of the DS range rather than a standalone product?
Although we have the name DS, we do not want to categorise it typically as a successor to the DS – we want it to be a tool that will bring more innovation in interactive entertainment to consumers. We're not pitching it as a direct evolution of the DS – it's not a typical successor.

In the last ten years Nintendo has launched some very important products – how does 3DS rank on the scale?
This is the first time I've been involved in hardware as producer – I was always a software producer. My original position was to develop titles that would support the launch. I've been involved in the launch titles, but as the hardware producer I'm looking at it as another pillar for Nintendo, placing special importance on it. But I am also producing *Nintendogs + Cats* and *Mario Kart*, so I'm still involved in the software.

Given that your background is software rather than hardware, what sort of challenges have you faced?
It was quite a pressure, because it was always Miyamoto and Iwata who were responsible for the overall vision of other projects, but I had to take that position as producer for 3DS. I came to understand the difficulties and challenges of that position. When I was only looking at software I had to work within the limitations of the hardware specifications. They present an upper limit, so my goal was to produce the best within those limits. However, as hardware producer, I can't just consider my games, I must also consider licensees and what sort of features they want to use. I have to make judgements on each of those features and design the hardware to take into account those demands. There are also other differences between hardware and software production. In hardware, everything connects to the direct cost of materials. There are physical elements that need readying at a very early stage; many decisions have to be made early on.

Talking specifically about the hardware, how does the 3D slider work?
I can't go into specifics, but the theory is simple. It adjusts the depth of the screen. It's basic 3D technology – the right and left







The longest queues at E3? At Nintendo's expansive stand, of course, for hands-on time with 3DS (left) and *Zelda: Skyward Sword* (above)

It is immediately evident that Nintendo has succeeded: here is a console that delivers true 3D effects with nothing between the user and the device, and the results are transfixing

fears aren't allayed by the fact that the hardware's particular 3D solution cannot be demonstrated on the enormous screens within LA's Nokia Theater. No, says Nintendo's Reggie Fils-Aime as he strides across the stage, you have to experience 3DS for yourself. And we get to see how as a smiley procession of 3DS-wielding ladies snakes into the auditorium, inviting us to get hands-on with Nintendo's technology now that the press conference has reached its conclusion. At a private demonstration away from the scrum, it is immediately evident that Nintendo has succeeded in its intention: here is a console that delivers true 3D effects with nothing between the user and the device, and the results are transfixing.

Using a 3DS is like experiencing a lenticular 3D image come to life. Perhaps the most arresting demonstration at E3 is one provided by Kojima Productions, which has evidently put in a lot of work recreating elements of *Metal Gear Solid 3* for a rolling demo which follows Solid Snake as he navigates a jungle filled with familiar hazards. The sequence is only partly interactive, allowing you to manipulate the camera to various degrees throughout, and it's set up this way in order to effectively stage action sequences that emphasise 3D effects. A swarm of insects appears to fly out of the screen, for example, while tropical vegetation pokes intrusively into your field of vision as the camera brushes past.

As far as playable software goes, we spend most of our time with *PilotWings Resort*, a continuation of the old and much-loved Nintendo flight sim series presented in the style of *Wii Sports Resort*, to the point that it appears to reappropriate some of the game's island geometry. The two challenges on offer require little more than passing through markers, but as a proof of concept it holds up well, the 3D effects pressing your jet-pack-powered character (or plane, depending on the challenge) right to the fore, your environments layered beyond, presenting a feeling of realism that would be more pronounced were this not such an obviously lighthearted game.

eye see different things with a gap between, so we gradually have them merge to turn the 3D into a linear image. It's a solution that uses both hardware and software. The typical hardware solution would just be an on/off switch, but I did many experiments with the software and the natural transition from 2D to 3D was really cool, so I wanted to implement it across hardware and software. We found that 3D effects differ depending on the user, so to be able to adjust to the most comfortable sweet spot is an important feature. Miyamoto gave us instant approval on that.

You've obviously done lots of tests during the R&D process – have you experienced any particular issues with tiredness among users?
I think the sense of eye fatigue differs for each individual. We've provided flexibility to allow users to adjust back to 2D. I think the solution is simply that when you feel dizzy, close down the system and take a break. Like with the Wii – don't swing too much or you'll tire your arms.

Will the ability to take 3D photos be an important part of certain applications, or do you view it as more of a bonus feature?
There are many possibilities; the ideas will expand over time. We have an augmented reality demo, for example, which recognises when a certain card is shown to the camera, making a dragon emerge on the screen.

What was the thinking behind the introduction of the 'Slide Pad'?

We found that 3D effects differ depending on the user, so to be able to adjust to the most comfortable sweet spot using the slider is an important feature. Miyamoto gave us instant approval on that

Hardware specifications have improved drastically over the past years in terms of presenting 3D graphics, and analogue control for games like *Mario Kart* and *Mario 64* is very sufficient, so it's simply that we think it's the way those games should be realised in handheld form.

You've shown games like *StarFox 64*, *PilotWings* and *Kid Icarus* on 3DS – why have you decided to focus on those rather than new properties?
We're not just developing nostalgic titles, but, as Miyamoto commented, we believe the 3DS can bring new experiences to old titles. That's why we're redeveloping *Ocarina Of Time*, *StarFox*, etc. But we're also working on new, innovative titles and ideas. We'd like everyone to appreciate how much easier 3D will make gameplay – in *StarFox*, for example, previously it was very difficult to go through the rings you encounter in the game, but with 3D you can instantly understand the distances involved.

Do you think a particular type of game is suited to the 3DS hardware, or is any genre appropriate?
I feel any game can be enjoyed on the 3DS, not just a specific genre. For example, as I say, we experimented on the Wii to realise *Wii Sports* in 3D, and it resulted in a very nice experience, especially the golf.

How have thirdparty developers taken to 3DS?
There were publishers who had concerns, but the SDK supports the stereoscopic 3D feature, so the software development side shouldn't be too difficult.

How would you rank the hardware's graphical capabilities? Can the system be reasonably compared to another platform?
For graphics, the directions taken with consoles and handhelds are different because of screen resolutions. We have issues with battery life, too, so we must balance the hardware chipset. For the 3DS we're using a different shader feature than we do on consoles, but we have a nice graphical feature that's different from what's possible on Wii.

During the press conference there was talk of online functionality and pushing content to the user rather than expecting them to go looking for it – how did this approach come about?
Everyone has been focused on the 3D side of the machine, but I had a special dedication to the online side, too. I'm often asked, "Why not make 3DS 3G, like a mobile phone?" But that takes much more money – it means that the customer must pay monthly fees. I have children myself, so if I heard that the system required a $50 subscription I would have reservations. I wanted the system to be as convenient as it can be in the online field. That's where our proposal came from. I wanted to realise a situation where you wake up in the morning, open your 3DS and there's new content already downloaded and waiting for you, not because you went looking for it but because we pushed it to you. For example, when a system requires an update, for consumers unfamiliar with the internet and networked devices, they may be reluctant to deal with it. We are currently considering how to make it simpler for them – so the consumer only has to press a button to get it all updated, for example. If we apply this, maybe one day consumers will open their 3DS and find that their daily paper or magazine subscription has already been delivered to their device. My ambition for the wireless networked futures of the 3DS is to have that automatic data downloaded to consumers as well as to enhance the tag mode implemented in the hardware in order to activate the communication between systems owned by different users.



Microsoft used E3 to officially debut its revised Xbox 360, which offers Wi-Fi as standard. At a time when it's looking to broaden its userbase via Kinect, however, many questioned why the hardware design has as much in common with the sci-fi stylings of the original Xbox as it does its immediate predecessor



Though Kinect was a central point of focus, Microsoft was hardly shy in emphasising its traditional IP

While the hardware's ability to render 3D effects with such apparent ease is a shock, it's also a surprise to discover how quickly you become accustomed to the 3DS display, especially when you're focused on a particular gameplay task. As your concentration deepens, the subtlety of depth effects begins to register less. The more the player is removed from the action, then, the more the 3D effects seem to grip hold, which obviously means that they'll be at their most effective during low-on-interactivity storytelling sections.

If Hollywood has its way, there will be plenty of pure storytelling arriving on 3DS in the form of 3D movies, and Nintendo is keen to demonstrate trailers for such treats at E3. The 3DS-powered promo of Legend Of The Guardians: The Owls Of Ga'Hoole we watch doesn't feel nearly as effective as the game demos on display. Perhaps the final version will be better optimised for the hardware.

Nintendo is not yet telling when such movies will be made available, or even when the 3DS hardware itself will reach shop shelves, or at what price. 'Before the end of 2010' and 'massmarket affordable' feel like reasonable punts. Having to wait until next year for such an obviously charming piece of gaming tech – and the attendant software that will make it sing – would be painful.

At least Microsoft is willing to put an official launch date against its Kinect peripheral – November 4 in the US – if not a price. The final name of the motion-sensing add-on has been spoiled prior to its big reveal, but during the remainder of E3 many game industry types will continue to refer to it as Natal. Prototype names have a habit of sticking – even unusual ones.

For Microsoft, E3 is about demonstrating, not just showing. You can't understand Kinect by

Continue

E3 cameras
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E3 *Bulletstorm* burgers
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Football mania
You *did* see John Terry doing a Bullet Bill, right?

Quit

Basketball mania
We like the Lakers. The car burning? Not so much

Woodland elves
The memories of Kinetic's E3 unveil won't shift. Brrr

Wireless hiccups
The bane of E3. Not even Miyamoto was immune

Q&A: Kudo Tsunoda General manager, Microsoft Game Studios

Among the more charismatic and energetic senior creatives working in today's videogame industry, **Kudo Tsunoda** is well placed to evangelise Microsoft's Kinect, a piece of hardware designed to get Xbox 360 owners off their sofas and interacting with games (and other functionality) in ways that aim to entirely transform the consumer/console relationship.

With Kinect offering controller-free gaming, what's your opinion on the value of the tactility of holding something in your hands?
The interesting thing to me is – we did a ton of user research – even with something like driving that everybody knows how to do, people will do it differently. Some people hold the wheel very tightly, some with one hand – everybody does it in their own way. You give someone a wheel and it forces them to play the game around the way you've designed it. It forces you to do things based around the piece of hardware you're putting in their hand. Kinect really frees you up to play the game in the way that feels best to you.

One of that things that's always annoyed me about games is they force you to learn the way the designer wanted you to play them. That's how you're successful at games. You go through a level, and then you get blocked somewhere, and then you turn another way and figure out how you get from point A to point B in the manner the designer intended. And I think that's part of what Kinect is delivering – instead of forcing you to put your hands around a piece of hardware we designed or forcing you to do the thing we want you to do, now we allow you to do things in the way that is the most comfortable and natural to you. It allows you to be the person who really is driving – sorry, I didn't meant that to be a pun – the experience you want in the way you want it. I always found stuff in your hand being so restrictive. It's creative handcuffs.

Are you concerned about the loss of physical feedback?
The thing I was most worried about was the [lack] of haptic feedback, but it's been really interesting how much you can do with visuals and audio. In many of the games we have people will crash a vehicle – and they'll go totally like this [mimes dodging out of the way]! And even people playing games with a controller, there's always people doing this [mimes driving motion]. They want to be moving. There's

> Instead of forcing you to put your hands around a piece of hardware we designed or forcing you to do the thing we want you to do, we allow you to do things the way that is the most comfortable to you

natural movements and reactions involved. I've never seen someone doing that from rumble. It's the audiovisual stuff.

The overwhelming thing we've discovered is that rumble is such a rudimentary form of haptic feedback. It's not like a little rumble in your palm is your whole way of interacting with the world – it's not like, oh, I stubbed my toe and I get a little rumble in my palm. It's more about the visual and audio feedback. We've had balls hit players' heads in games and they'll move their heads back and say, "Ow!" It's almost laughable the way people hold on to rumble as the holy grail of haptic feedback. We've gone so far past anything that can be done with rumble, or that kind of restrictive thing you have to hold. It's been creatively liberating to work on this stuff.

What are the challenges of removing the input limitations that games provide?
I think it's more meaningful than the shift from linear to open world design. In an open world design there's still a set number of choices. But human beings are so varied in the way that they do things that it's challenging to figure what is natural for so many different people. You'd think driving is straightforward, but people drive in like 85 million different ways. And it's really how robust and sophisticated the Kinect tech is that we can take into account the different ways people do something and have it be meaningful to them inside the game. It's super challenging – you have to reprogram your brain to





Controlling the Xbox 360 interface via Kinect involves voice recognition and an onscreen hand cursor manoeuvred by tracking your real-life equivalent

Kinect-ing the dots

The games look conventional, but they prove the technology is anything but

Microsoft's choice of games to promote Kinect makes few gestures toward its applications for hobbyists. They instead demonstrate its capacity to provide familiar experiences that have been trailblazed by other companies, showing off its broad appeal across ages and gender. Microsoft may point to the *Forza* demo, yet that is about arcade racing and car porn rather than hardcore gaming. But there's enough to prove that the tech has huge potential, and that, despite the games' conventional nature, Kinect is a completely different proposal to Wii and Move.



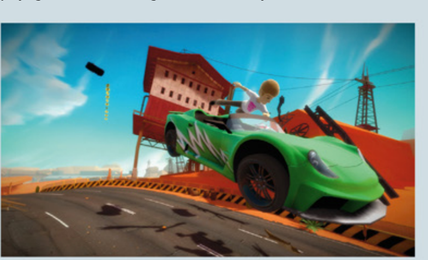
E3's wall of noise defeated *Kinectimals*' voice recognition, but our baby carnivore swiftly responded to us hopping, jumping, lying down, playing dead and balancing, arms out, our way around an assault course



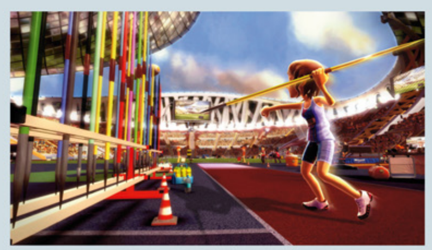
Smartly designed, tracking your moves without making too much of your inadequacies, and bursting with wide appeal, Harmonix's *Dance Central* was the most immediately popular Kinect game at E3



Placing you on the screen in Ubisoft's *Your Shape: Fitness Evolved* gives it a clear advantage over the rest of the fitness genre, and a range of options, from tai chi to simple punching games, provides inviting variety



Joy Ride's hands-aloft steering is much more tight and responsive than you'd expect, though without tactile response it feels disembodied. It's natural to lean to drift and push to boost, making it an accessible racer



Yes, Rare really is going up against Nintendo. Having played hurdles and bowling, however, *Kinect Sports* feels like a convincing take. Light on technique and heavy on competitive physicality, it's about inclusive fun



think about creativity in a different way. You need to work hard from a creative perspective to figure out the ways people might do something. But it's really nice that Kinect technology can handle the different ways people do things and make it feel natural for people. People are getting a direct link to the fun inside the experience.

What sort of lag are you working with, and what measures are you using to work around it?
It's funny, because when we measure lag, it's a very technical way of looking at things: "Hey, it's this many milliseconds". I mean, controllers have lag. The great thing with Kinect is that we can receive an input just as fast. Let's say we're playing a game in which we're gonna see a bell go off and whoever can enter an input fastest wins. You're going to press a button and I'm going to go like this [gestures]. We can do it as fast with Kinect as with a button.

But the way we measure 'lag' is by putting people in front of the experience and measuring their thoughts. Either it feels good or it feels sloppy. It's not how many milliseconds, it's: "Does it feel good? Does it react fast? Does it feel as if you're in control?"

We were down here last E3 and we brought a racing game for that reason. At high speed, if there's any lag, the controls will feel bad. Kinect *Joy Ride* feels really tight – you feel like you're in control and the game's doing what you want, and that's the important stuff.

Who are you expecting to buy Kinect when it comes out in November? What kind of audience is the current package aimed at?
I honestly believe it's everybody. With your traditional 18–34 gamer demographic, I think there's a ton of stuff for them – the voice technology is super advanced; there's the gameplay depth in our games; the control of movies with your voice; getting auto signed in because the system knows you. All that stuff's great.

It's great for families to be able to play together. It's great for me – the first game I worked on at Microsoft was *Gears Of War 2*; I've got a ton of nieces and nephews and if you say, "Hey, let's play *Gears Of War 2*," their parents aren't really happy. They're six years old and can barely handle the controller as it is. But now we can play games together and have fun. There's so many types of people now who can play games on Xbox.

Who do you think games should sell to? Not just videogames but any type of games. Sports, board games, jump rope. Everyone likes playing games. That's what we're doing with Kinect – opening this stuff up to different types of people.

How important is it for Kinect to be providing completely revolutionary experiences?
I think it's easy for creative people – and I like to think of myself as a creative person – to get wrapped up with thinking about something 'revolutionary' all the time, but if it's not enjoyable, no one's going to like it. I'm glad Kinect is revolutionary and new, and no matter what, controlling something in a digital world through your body and voice has never been done anywhere. Since we announced stuff at E3 last year so many people have come to us to ask about this technology and what can be done with it. It totally is that revolutionary thing that nobody's seen before. But that's not as important as people having fun.

When you're doing something new, like controller-free interaction in a digital space, it's helpful to put it in a familiar environment before evolving it into other things… to put the technology into people's hands, get people feeling good, and move on from there. With Kinect, you can get in, play right away, have a good time and it's an experience unlike anything else you'll have. I don't see it in terms of the revolutionary thing or the innovation thing – I see it as a fun experience you won't be able to have anywhere else.

For smaller developers and independent developers, is it going to be possible and affordable for them to be making Kinect games?
That's something Microsoft has focused on over the history of Xbox, with XNA, people making XBLA games, and so on. There's so many different price points for Xbox games from a consumer and developer perspective. We're very focused on that as a company. I think as we come up with something new like Kinect, the best experience will come from people getting their hands on it – new people getting to play with stuff and do different things with it. The thing I'm most excited about with E3 is getting out and playing all the other companies' Kinect games! I really believe the more we get the tech into different kinds of creative people's hands, the more creative things will come. As a company we're very good about making sure different people can make games, and we want to continue that as a platform.



One of E3's biggest shocks? Valve's Gabe Newell pledging support to PS3 via *Portal 2* at Sony's press confernce






Though Sony has been showing demos of 3D-enabled PS3 games since GDC 2009, it's only now that it's really pushing them. At E3 there was no shortage of attendees wanting to try out the tech

seeing videos of fake families enjoying apparent knock-offs of *Nintendogs* and *Wii Sports* because playing its games is crucial to realising that the system is about a lot more than that.

A measure of the success of the Kinect games demonstrated at E3 is that we're not ashamed to look stupid playing them. Microsoft's stand is intimidatingly designed, with each game housed in its own perspex-fronted pod to allow onlookers a full view of your experience. And yet, seconds into trying *Kinect Adventures*, we're absorbed. Most importantly, the experience is intuitive: piloting a raft down rapids is simple to grasp, immediately fun to try, and its seamless introduction into play of another player who walks into the field of view, and the ensuing jostling cooperation required to stay on track, is no small achievement.

Similarly instinctive are *Kinect Sports*' bowling and hurdles. For the latter, grasping the timing for the jumps within your running rhythm needs experience, as does the technique (it's all about getting the knees up), but bowling shows up even *Wii Sports*' equivalent for being alienatingly complex. Here, you simply reach an arm out for the ball, and then bowl. To put spin on the ball, simply draw your arm across your body at the apex of the throw. And lag? It's evident in each game, and discernible to varying degrees, but it doesn't meaningfully detract from the enjoyment.

These firstparty demonstrations of Kinect's properties are strangely conservative, though, presenting familiar games in new clothes. Curiously, it's thirdparty software that really shows the hardware's potential for defining new forms of entertainment. *Your Shape: Fitness Evolved*, using Kinect's ability to track your entire body, simply couldn't work on any other platform, nor could Harmonix's as-slick-as-expected *Dance Central*.

Lacking, too, in Microsoft's presentations is proof of how Kinect can enrich core games beyond

Q&A: **Shuhei Yoshida** President, Sony Computer Entertainment Worldwide Studios

Shuhei Yoshida arrives at E3 with a longer list of responsibilities – and a bigger address book – than just about any other attendee. As the ultimate head of Sony's game studios, he oversees a vast workforce dedicated to a range of platforms across diverse genres, taking in some of the most progressively minded gaming software in existence.

A little while ago, certain sections of the development community, including the likes of Valve, were quite hostile towards PS3, but there seems to have been a shift of late. Why do you think that's happened?
We made many mistakes in terms of making new hardware that was difficult to architect games on. At launch, the libraries were not at a level that people were comfortable with. So the SCEI people in Tokyo made a huge effort to talk to developers about what they were working on, and what to change. We participated in those efforts by providing some of the tools we were using to make our own games. I think thirdparty developers have become accustomed to making games on PlayStation 3, and once they cross that line, they feel comfortable and find the extra power PS3 can provide. I think it's changed step by step – it's been a gradual change.

> We're not necessarily saying that Killzone 3 in stereoscopic 3D is the best way of playing it, more that it's just taking advantage of the technology. It's a great experience that we believe in for the long term

One hurdle you must be coming up against is a consumer base that is now being told that in order to play games like *Killzone 3* at their optimal levels, they have to be prepared to purchase new televisions.
We're not necessarily saying that *Killzone 3* in 3D is the best way, more that it's just taking advantage of the technology. It allows games to show more depth – it clarifies which characters are in the background, and in a racing game it's easier to judge distances at corners, for example. It's a great experience that we believe in for the long term. It's a natural thing for a human being to look at things in 3D – it's a natural progression, an evolution for media and games. Of course, we understand that TVs aren't cheap, and that people have long cycles before changing – some may use a TV for five years, others for ten years. We're not forcing people to buy a 3DTV now, but TV companies are making efforts – companies are announcing that in future most of them will be adopting 3D functionality as standard. In the near future I'm sure people won't think about buying a 3DTV, just a new TV that comes with 3D. Every year more and more people will have one.

Microsoft's press conference opened with *Call Of Duty*, *Gears Of War 3* and *Halo: Reach*, which to many people sum up the 360 experience. Do you feel that the PlayStation experience is much broader?
In practical purposes those are Microsoft's strengths – they have very strong FPSes, for example, and they work with Activision to provide content for *Call Of Duty*. It's very interesting to see them confirm where they have strengths by opening with those games. When they showed Kinect I was surprised to see so much focus on the more casual side. It was a polarised kind of approach. As we said, we tend to welcome a variety of games. From the beginning of R&D for Move we made it our goal to make sure it worked both for casual games and hardcore games. The system requirements, the precision and the responsiveness all took that into account. Hardcore game developers are very, very demanding, and unless we provide something very good, they won't accept it. Looking at the line-up of Move games, we are very happy to have a variety of games, from casual to hardcore. But of course we have non-Move software as well – games like *LBP2* are very broad in scope, for example, and then you have games like *GT5*. We are not focusing on one area, or two areas, but covering a full audience spectrum.



You have many different strands of activity, including PS2, PSP, PS3, PSN, Move and 3D, so how difficult is it to manage this sort of breadth, and to ensure that you're as effective as you can be in each area?
That's exactly the job I have [laughs]. We have a certain budget and we're very fortunate that the company understands the importance of firstparty development. Sony as a whole is very understanding and supportive of our needs. But we have so many teams that we work with, so many platforms and initiatives, and lots of ground we

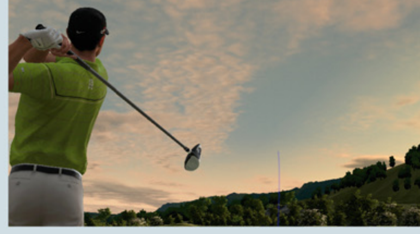




Moving closer

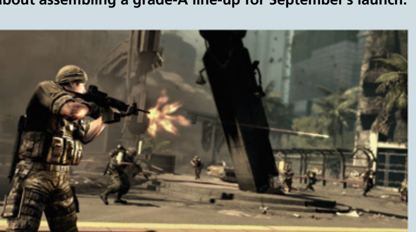
Sony's motion-sensing hardware gets the chance to reach out at E3

The key aspect of the Move-controlled offerings at E3 is that, compared to what Microsoft has lined up for Xbox 360 via Kinect in the adjacent hall, they feel more traditionally game-like, which is no surprise considering many of them consist of concepts that have been touched on via Wii or, in the case of games like *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 11* or *SOCOM 4*, extend joypad-proven PlayStation series in new directions. Sony's hardware stands up to the stress test that comes with an outing at E3; now it's all about assembling a grade-A line-up for September's launch.

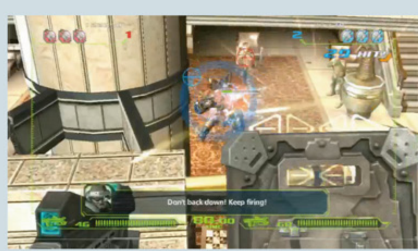


The most smooth-running and solid stage demo of a motion device at E3, *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 11* is all about the 1:1 tracking that Sony touts as a key Move advantage. A perfect marriage of form and content

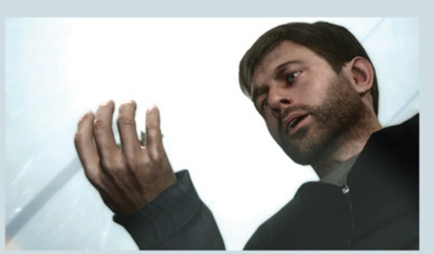
An original IP that looks like a mind-melding strain of competitive Jenga, *Tumble* plays with a variety of different materials. Positioning the pieces of your grand design will be a fine test of Move's precision



A revision rather than a revolution, *SOCOM 4* looks to have inherited some of *SOCOM: Confrontation*'s weaknesses, but as proof of how Move can be applied to intense, precise action, it's an important one to watch



Freed from the abomination of *Time Crisis 4*'s orange gun-troller, *Time Crisis: Razing Storm* could be an easy Move-powered sell for Bandai Namco. Use Sony's 'shooting attachment' for optimal results



An appropriate pairing of *Heavy Rain*'s prompt-based interactions and Move's gesture recognition should result in a more immersive experience. Dynamic left hooks, uppercuts and fridge openings await

want to cover. To be honest, a couple of years ago, working on launch titles for PS3, we shifted focus too much away from PSP. After the launch of PSP, because PS3 was coming, for the first year we didn't have enough PSP support. So, two years ago, we quickly moved some support back – that's why we had a better line-up last year and this year. So balancing support is a very important job.

An interview with Sony president Howard Stringer suggested that the company as a whole is betting the farm on 3D. Does it feel that way within SCE?
Yes. Sony is one of those large companies with lots of different groups doing their own things, but 3D is one thing that really unites different parts of the company. A few years ago Howard talked about "Sony United", a kind of internal slogan aimed at getting different parts of Sony to work together, but the 3DTV initiative is the real Sony United. Throughout SCE we previously had barely any direct contact with other parts of Sony. A marketing group may have a core marketing project here and there, but 3DTV has allowed us to talk directly to people like the Sony Pictures guys working on 3D movies or the broadcast people who have worked on creating 3D content for broadcast. That really helped us because we were late in adopting 3D tech compared to the film industry; having access to those internal people helped us to get up and running quickly. In terms of 3D, games are very advantageous media: frames are created on the fly and we allocate one element to the left eye and one to the right eye in a very simple manner, so we can adapt 3D tech pretty easily compared to 3D film. From the Sony TV group standpoint, getting the support from the PlayStation group has been crucial to getting content to consumers – they love what we're doing, and we help them improve on R&D for TV. That was a unique experience – we provided games for them to try on their TVs to see if they were able to display properly. That's a new thing – we've never previously had that direct relationship – and we enjoy having these relationships with other parts of Sony.

At your press conference, Peter Dille said that the feedback you receive from developers is that the data they receive from the Move dev environment makes it preferable to other motion-control solutions – can you elaborate on this point?
There are different layers in the hardware. There are hardware drivers – a directory that connects Move to PS3 – and on top of that layer is the library that the US R&D group provide. Because Move has three separate sensors in it – and also the camera tracks the sphere on the controller – receiving raw data from all the sensors presents a very complex mathematical issue that a team has to solve. That's where the libraries come in – they combine all of the sensor readings and provide the exact data format that programmers need, along with options on how to use the data. That's what Pete was saying. To incorporate Move functionality into a game – even existing games like *Resident Evil 5*, or a game that was close to being finished on the technical side, like *SOCOM 4* – is very straightforward to do.

Has the fact that the game development community as a whole has had a certain amount of experience with making Wii games proved a big advantage in terms of creating Move software?
Absolutely, although it can depend on the developer, too. If the developer thinks what we're providing is like the Wii, then the team will not push or take advantage of what Move can do. Certainly at SCE's studios we have a lot of experience of what it can do – our division was one of the initial concept teams behind the Move concept. We worked with [SCE senior researcher] Rick Marks' research group in the US to come up with ideas; we looked at different technologies including 3D cameras, magnetic sensors, sonic sensors, etc, and came up with this combination of motion sensors and the camera. As we were doing it we were talking with different developers, including those who had worked on Wii games, and their experience was interesting. When they started making a Wii game they had a list of ten different things they wanted to achieve but found that only two or three things were possible due to the limitations of the technology. So those teams already have ideas that they wanted to incorporate, and now they can do those things with Move. These people have prototyped things on Wii, and some of their ideas that didn't work out can be tried again on Move. I'm sure it'll be good to incorporate some of the concepts that couldn't be realised before.

Also, it's about teaching consumers what to expect. Playing Move, sometimes the position you're standing in is really important because Move can track exactly where in the 3D space your controller is. In a Wii game you might have to point at a character or use the direction buttons to move it across the screen, like in bowling, but with Move you can just change your standing position. People who have experience of playing Wii games might not consider moving their bodies like this. We are learning how to give step-by-step directions to consumers. Developers didn't have to think about these kinds of things with conventional controllers, so we have to think about teaching consumers how it all works.

SOUND BYTES

"I'll be quick. Pew pew pew! So am I crazy or did I just see a hundred French acrobats prancing around an arena the other night? I hear there was a sale on blue ponchos. But seriously, I know everyone's got their eye on this motion-control battle like it was Olivia Munn in a Lara Croft outfit. I say it's time we focused on what really matters. The games. Who's with me?

"See, I love gaming. OK? I love walk-off homers and headshots. I love drifting the turn at a hundred miles an hour, and boss battles with a 600-foot Greek god who may or may not be your father. Gaming is having a ridiculously huge TV in a tiny one-bedroom apartment. Staying up till 3am to earn a trophy that isn't real – but is. And it's girls who know that the quickest way to a man's heart is through a melee attack.

"I love gaming. And I know you love it too. That's why you're here. And why millions of people are pretending to work while they watch this at their desk. It's why we made the PlayStation Move – so every person on this great spinning marble will be able to get a taste of the PS3 sugar. Families, kids, grandparents… and you hardcore guys, I'm talking about you.

"Don't hate on them, don't do it. Look at it this way: if you've got an awesome girlfriend, and then someone else gets an awesome girlfriend, do you know who wins? Everyone.

"With Playstation Move, your mom can make 'your mom' jokes, after she takes you to school in table tennis. And a ten-year-old kid in Fresno can make a fratboy in Boston question his own manhood. We can all box using game characters that have important features like arms and necks.

"When we said the PS3 only did everything, we meant it. And the Move brings a whole lot more everything to the table. Because every gamer is a true gamer… motion gamers…. sitting gamers… everyone. And that we may pledge fanboy allegiances to different flags, deep down inside we all serve one master, one king. And his name is gaming. FOREVER MAY HE REIGN!"

Sony's killer marketing device **Kevin Butler** takes to the stage at its E3 press conference and gives it both barrels



As usual, Sony Computer Entertainment America's Jack Tretton was a good host at the company's E3 press conference, but the star of the event was pretend marketing man Kevin Butler, who was also a bold focal point at the West Hall of the LA Convention Center itself

a mode tacked on to *Forza*. Indeed, with the focus set so squarely on games which have players standing, E3 is rife with talk questioning Kinect's ability to track seated players. Right now, experienced (and NDA-restricted) developers are keeping their lips sealed on precisely what Kinect can and can't do, but demos show that Xbox 360 media can at least be browsed from the sofa. It's not until we get to install the system in our own cluttered living rooms that Kinect's practical capabilities will be clear, but evidence at E3 shows that its instinctive nature has the capacity to provide something fundamentally new to gaming, albeit mostly at the more family-focused end of the spectrum (at least for now). Whether the mainstream market will appreciate that potential and choose to make the upgrade from their far more affordable Wiis is another matter.

If it's an expensive gaming treat you're after, however, Sony has the premium option in the form of its stereoscopic 3D solution. Upon arriving at its E3 press conference, every attendee is handed a pair of polarised 3D glasses, and the star of the show, *Killzone 3*, delivers appropriately dramatic action with depth effects both obvious and subtle.

What PlayStation 3 did for Blu-ray, assures Sony Computer Entertainment chief Kaz Hirai, it's ready to do for 3D. Be the key driver of its adoption in the living room, in other words

What PlayStation 3 did for Blu-ray, assures Sony Computer Entertainment chief Kaz Hirai, it's ready to do for 3D. Be the key driver of its adoption in the living room, in other words, although everyone seems to agree that, with 3DTVs costing rather more than a PS3 console, the rate of take-up is likely to follow a shallower curve. There's no escaping the fact, either, that, having been introduced to Nintendo's 3DS only hours earlier, being required to rest a pair of glasses on your nose in order to enjoy the PS3 3D experience feels oddly old-fashioned. Nevertheless, Sony is firmly committed to its initiative, promising 20 native 3D games on PS3 by March of next year.

Introduce the motion-sensing Move setup to the 3D equation and Sony promises us the closest thing we'll ever experience to "being in the game". Even without stereoscopic 3D, though, Move works as convincingly as it did at its debut airing during GDC in March. Importantly to the type of person attending E3, it is more tuned to traditional gaming experiences than Kinect, and indeed Sony announces that, alongside dedicated new Move IP in the works, a number of existing games are in the process of being re-engineered to make use of the system, including *Heavy Rain* and *Resident Evil 5*.

The cost of adding Move to your PS3 setup in the US will involve $50 for the motion controller, $30 for the navigation controller (previously known as the sub-controller), plus $40 for a PlayStation Eye, although a $100 package consisting of a motion controller, PlayStation Eye, Move demo disc and the full *Sports Champions* game will also be available at launch, which is pencilled in for September in the west, and October in Japan.

The suggestion during Sony's press conference is that the key Move advantage over Kinect is the fact that you get to hold something in your hand(s) while playing, and it's a something that features buttons. For all of Kinect's innovation, Microsoft's assertion that *pretending* to hold a steering wheel is a preferable experience to *actually* holding a steering wheel remains a difficult one to sell. The PlayStation Move setup doesn't pretend to be a steering wheel, but when it comes to luring the enormous Wii audience to PS3, its ostensible similarity to Nintendo's trailblazing approach can only prove advantageous. Crucially, of course, it will need a software line-up appealing enough to even get those Wii owners to turn their heads.

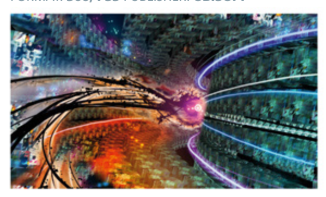
We leave Sony's press conference and head for the comparatively glitz-free E3 event itself. There is plenty more to see, but it will be relatively light on posturing, and not nearly so loaded with messaging and positioning that may in time not look quite as sensible as it does here in sun-baked LA in June 2010. E3 2011 will certainly have to go some way to top this year's event.

The games of E3

A selection of highlights to complement the titles showcased in this issue's Hype section

Child Of Eden

FORMAT: **360, PS3** PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT**



Tetsuya Mizuguchi returns with the visual, and spiritual, successor to the wireframe wizardry of *Rez*. Expect fried synapses and hypnotised eyes in 2011

Rayman Origins

FORMAT: **360, PS3** PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT**



Cheeky, chirpy and slap-happy, the limbless one reared his floating head in a standout trailer that showed off a reversion to side-scrolling form

Crysis 2

FORMAT: **360, PC, PS3** PUBLISHER: **EA**



3D functionality for all three platforms will make your wallet – and possibly your eyes – weep. So might "the most intelligent enemies ever" in an FPS

NBA Jam

FORMAT: **WII** PUBLISHER: **EA**



Squeaky shoed two-on-two hoop-shooting madness returns with a somersaulting, flame-dunking, giant-headed revamp. BOOOOOOM-SHAKA-LAKA, and so on

Mario Sports Mix

FORMAT: **WII** PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**



Volleyball, basketball, ice hockey and dodgeball get the Mushroom Kingdom treatment – from Square Enix, oddly enough. Four players, power-ups, chaos

I Am Alive

FORMAT: **360, PS3** PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT**



The strobing demise of a city and the glimpses of realist survival horror that await tease something more than the usual mix of zombies and guns

Scott Pilgrim Vs The World

FORMAT: **PS3** PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT**



A game based on a film based on a graphic novel series that riffs on games? Animation maestro Paul Robertson pays respect to the 8bit brawlers of old

EA Sports Active 2

FORMAT: **360, PS3, WII, IPHONE** PUBLISHER: **EA**



A built-in personal trainer, nine-week programs, 1:1 motion tracking via Kinect, 70 new exercises and a heart-rate monitor make us want to sit down already

The Sims 3

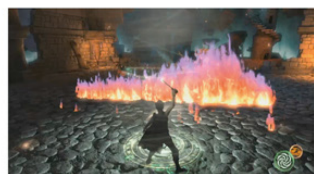
FORMAT: **360, 3DS, DS, PC, PS3, WII** PUBLISHER: **EA**



PS3 and 360 get create and share options along with achievements, trophies and Facebook connectivity. Wii offers character control and fourplayer betting

Sorcery

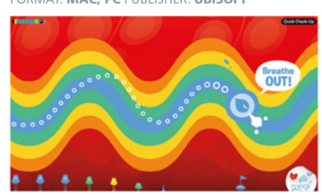
FORMAT: **PS3** PUBLISHER: **SCE**



This wand waggler uses Move to sling spells at goblins, combining attacks to whip up foes in flaming whirlwinds. Charmed everyone at Sony's press event

Innergy

FORMAT: **MAC, PC** PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT**



An exercise title that rewards patience rather than happy feet and aims to bring control to your cardio with a bundled 'Energy Sensor'. Virtual yoga, then?

Battlefield Bad Company 2: Vietnam

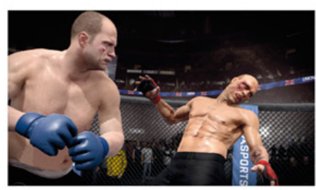
FORMAT: **360, PC, PS3** PUBLISHER: **EA**



While simultaneously supplying *Medal Of Honor*'s multiplayer mode, DICE is also ushered in to take this multiplayer expansion back in time to 'Nam

EA Sports MMA

FORMAT: **360, PS3** PUBLISHER: **EA**



THQ's monopoly on nose-breaking mixed martial arts fighting wasn't going to go unchallenged forever. You can now upload fights online for all to wince at

Spare Parts

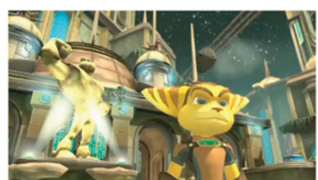
FORMAT: **360, PS3** PUBLISHER: **EA**



EA goes for the DLC casual jugular with a multiplayer robot platformer. Hopefully the cluttered art direction won't interfere with the extensive smashing

Heroes On The Move

FORMAT: **PS3** PUBLISHER: **SCE**



With Move support and twoplayer co-op, six of PlayStation's most beloved family-friendly mascots come together to fight evil in an all-action adventure

Project Dust

FORMAT: **360, PC, PS3** PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT**



A return for creator/designer Eric Chahi – of *Another World* and *Heart Of Darkness* fame – labelled "the spiritual heir to *Populous*", with dynamic ecology

Medal Of Honor

FORMAT: **360, PC, PS3** PUBLISHER: **EA**



EA's gameplay demo is frantic and furiously paced. Whether this really is a *COD* killer with a conscience remains to be seen, but it's certainly loud and proud

Harry Potter ATDH Part 1

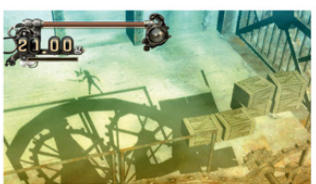
FORMAT: **360, PC, PS3, WII, DS** PUBLISHER: **EA**



Gears Of War with magic is the pitch as EA Bright Light puts a more action-oriented spin on the game based on the upcoming Deathly Hallows movie

Lost In Shadow

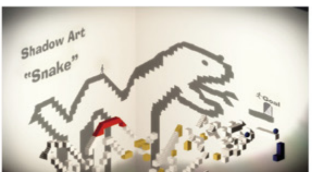
FORMAT: **WII** PUBLISHER: **KONAMI**



Hudson's puzzle platformer sees you toy with lightsources and perspective to help a shadow navigate an arcane tower and return to its host

Echochrome II

FORMAT: **PS3** PUBLISHER: **SCE**



The perspective-based puzzler adds light and shadow to its repertoire of optical illusions. Use Move to manipulate lightsources and illuminate the journey

Industry FOCUS

In association with Screen Digest

Nintendo delivers again

Screen Digest's Piers Harding-Rolls is feeling optimistic about 3DS

We now know quite a bit more about Nintendo's new handheld and the company's ability to pull off the world's first truly massmarket 3D device. In the run up to E3, there was plenty of positive news coming from various quarters of the industry about Nintendo's new handheld and, as it turned out, it delivered the biggest spectacle of the event. Just when things were becoming a little sticky for Nintendo – DS and Wii sales have shown some substantial year-on-year decline in recent months – the company responds with the 3DS and delivers on its promise of releasing entirely new platforms that provide strong innovation and move the market and industry on from the previous cycle.

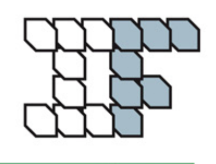
There's no doubt that the smartphone-driven app store opportunity represents a significant threat to the handheld console market. The encroaching competition offering cheap-as-chips content and a catalogue of thousands of games



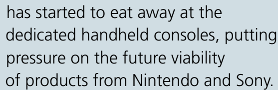




Where once Nintendo debuted its hardware in one iteration, it now shows various colour options from the outset – a tactic which illustrates that its intended audience for 3DS is as broad as possible



www.screendigest.com



has started to eat away at the dedicated handheld consoles, putting pressure on the future viability of products from Nintendo and Sony.

A quick study of platform user demographics shows that Sony's PSP business is more directly under threat, because there's a substantial crossover of smartphone users and 18–35-year-old male PSP owners. Even without Nintendo's move to 3D, I expected the company to be able to defend its market position more successfully because the DS has a massive following of younger gamers from age six upwards, and is also enjoyed by many girls. Smartphones and other touchscreen devices, although getting cheaper, have yet to be taken up by this younger audience to a significant degree, but it would be naïve to suggest the DS wasn't suffering to any extent due to the success of game sales on the app stores of mobile devices.

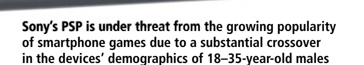
The change in competitive climate only goes to highlight the intelligence behind Nintendo's move to embrace 3D. The company is taking its handheld business into a new technological arena – one where the leading smartphones and touchscreen media players are currently unable to follow using existing content or simple firmware updates.



It's clear that the 3DS will have a substantial impact on consumer awareness, demand and acceptance of 3D games, movies and home entertainment experiences

While both the PSP and DSi underlined the convergence of handheld and mobile devices on platforms with social functionality and non-gaming features – placing them more directly into a head-on collision with advancing smartphone devices – the 3DS has strengthened Nintendo's handheld future in one technological move. There is, once again, a reason for desiring a dedicated handheld games console in addition to the impressive functionality and content catalogues of the more powerful touchscreen phones. So Nintendo has put itself into the strongest position possible under the existing competitive conditions at the end of the DS cycle.

It's also clear that the 3DS will have a substantial impact on consumer awareness, demand and acceptance of 3D games, movies and home entertainment experiences. Now tell me, who expected the massmarket adoption of 3D to be driven by a handheld device, or even by Nintendo – a company that has recently innovated heavily in terms of user interface, but has sat back to let Microsoft and Sony compete on high-definition graphics? It's now much more likely that consumers' first experience of 3D in the home won't come from the high-definition consoles or 3D PC gaming setups, which have been at the centre of the discussion around 3D home entertainment, but through a much cheaper handheld alternative that requires no expensive new monitor or TV, and no separate 3D glasses to experience. Initial user feedback at E3 and the content on offer underlines the point that the 3DS is likely to be of interest to quite a wide number of consumers and, although much depends on the quality of the 3D experience and pricing, I currently expect this interest to convert into strong sales. Nintendo's ability to innovate and to take the company in new and unexpected directions suggests we'll be enjoying Nintendo products for many years to come, even with the increased fragmentation of the games sector and the proliferation of devices that are able to distribute and play gaming content.



Sony's PSP is under threat from the growing popularity of smartphone games due to a substantial crossover in the devices' demographics of 18–35-year-old males

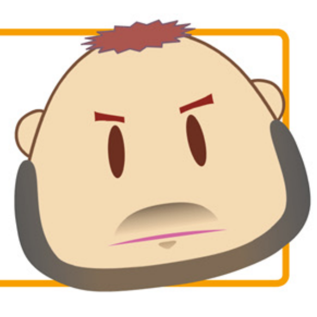


With its DS, Nintendo has appealed to younger gamers, who have yet to take up hardware from the likes of Apple in any great number

SOMETHING ABOUT Japan

3D or not 3D?

Game producer Brick Bardo on games that jump out at you



By the time you read this, E3 will be over. Sadly, I won't be attending the show so you'll have to wait until next time for my thoughts on what was shown. Instead, I'd like to talk about 3D technology and its potential impact on games.

I've already written about Avatar, and the massive impact it has had in Japan. Many more 3D movies have followed, such as Alice In Wonderland and Clash Of The Titans. Even a documentary featuring popular South Korean actor Bae Yong Joon was released in cinemas in 3D. But while Avatar was an experience designed around 3D technology, many of the movies I've mentioned above were not. Indeed, aside from animated films such as Pixar's Up, I struggle to think of any other film that utilised the third dimension as effectively as Avatar. There's a sense of depth in the visuals but they're hardly fully 3D experiences. Show Clash Of The Titans to someone who hadn't seen Avatar and their major impression of 3D technology will be that it makes the film look darker and less sharp.

I really enjoy 3D experiences. When I was a kid, I remember dashing to the nearest 7-Eleven convenience store to buy some flimsy blue and red 3D glasses just to enjoy the 3D movie Gorilla At Large that was on television later that day. In my university days, I couldn't miss Friday The 13th Part 3 and Jaws 3D in theatres. I even went to see that rubbish remake of Night Of The Living Dead. I also go to theme parks not for the rollercoasters, but to enjoy rides that use 3D effects. So, yes, I do enjoy 3D stuff.

There's no reason for a 3DS game to be utilising the 3D effect constantly. Instead, developers could choose to deploy the effect at certain key moments. Since the 3DS doesn't use glasses, this won't require the action to stop

It's because of my slightly overenthusiastic love for 3D technology that I'm concerned about the way in which it's being applied. How can you expect to get an enjoyable 3D effect when you just apply it to a movie that wasn't designed around the presence of 3D? Objects floating on top of each other isn't 3D. Avatar showed what a real 3D experience needs to be. Because there isn't enough content being made especially for 3D viewing, many old 2D films are being converted into 3D. The other day, it was announced that the Japanese movie Battle Royale is going to be converted into 3D. In the US, a 3D version of the original Star Wars is being considered. I just can't feel excited, even if George Lucas does add new and exciting 3D dogfights throughout the movie.

3DTV is coming, and we're told that we're entering a new era of entertainment. I think we've established that I'm a huge 3D fan, but I find myself hesitating. I don't plan on buying a 3D television yet because there's nothing worth watching. So what about people less excited about 3D technology than I am? I think the prospect of being forced to wear 3D glasses at home will be



enough of an obstacle. Then there's the cost. I really can't see the so-called '3D revolution' spreading into homes any time soon.

There's another barrier, too. Historically, the success of any new hardware has been tied to the quality and volume of its 'erotic' content. Home video only became a success after the porn industry invested massively in it. I feel that 3D technology will be successful if that particular industry manages to make a convincing use of it for home use.

Videogames could be an important factor, too. Since games already take place in 3D environments, the technology is a natural fit for new titles, and older titles can be updated with more success than is the case with films. Nintendo has already unveiled the 3DS handheld, which, due to being glasses-free, will no doubt be popular with general consumers.

I used to watch the 3D television specials of shows like Kamen no Ninja Akakage and Jinzoningen Kikaider in my youth. They weren't in 3D throughout – just during key moments. At certain points in the episode, the hero would turn to the camera and say something like: "Hey! Put your glasses on! The moment has come!" It was quite fun for a seven-year-old, but it did tend to distract from the overall experience. Do you see where I'm going with this?

There's no reason for a 3DS game to be utilising the 3D effect constantly. Instead, developers could choose to deploy the effect at certain key moments and sequences. And since the 3DS doesn't use glasses, this won't require the action to stop while the hero asks viewers to put on a flimsy piece of eyewear. Just as with cinema, it's the experiences built around the strengths of the tech that promise to be the most exciting.

Are games going to spearhead the march of 3D into our homes? Both the movie and game industries are hoping the third dimension will offer a solution to falling revenues in a time of increased economic hardship, but whereas Hollywood is the more aggressive proponent of the technology, it's videogames that promise the most exciting applications.

Super Mario Galaxy 2

Lost Planet 2

Weekly Famitsu (Enterbrain) Japanese sales, May 10–June 6

Game/weekly sales/lifetime sales

1. ***Super Mario Galaxy 2*** (Nintendo, Wii): 453,722 (NE)
2. ***Dragon Quest Monster Joker 2*** (Square Enix, DS): 240,007 (1,131,853)
3. ***Lost Planet 2*** (Capcom, PS3): 143,137 (NE)
4. ***Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker*** (Konami, PSP): 123,521 (705,881)
5. ***Winning Eleven 2010 Aoki Samurai No Chosen*** (Konami, PS3): 96,622 (NE)
6. ***Super Robot Taisen OG Saga*** (BNG, DS): 95,502 (NE)
7. ***Medarot DS*** (Rocket Company, DS): 72,610 (NE)
8. ***Sakatsuku DS World Challenge 2010*** (Sega, DS): 67,204 (NE)
9. ***Wii Fit Plus*** (Nintendo, Wii): 54,666 (1,958,687)
10. ***Tomodachi Collection*** (Nintendo, DS): 51,122 (3,286,244)



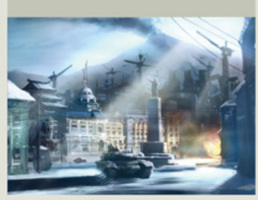
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Hype

The future of electronic entertainment

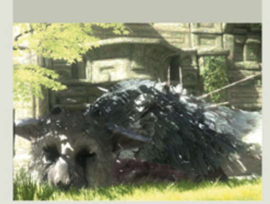
Edge's most wanted

Devil's Third



There will be guns – and ninjas with semi-automatics. The trailer hints at open levels with plenty of opportunities for ninja dogs to run, hide and die. Itagaki returns.
360, PS3, THQ

The Last Guardian



Microsoft and Nintendo may have digital kittens, but Team Ico's title has the only furry friend we want. The rumoured HD remasters of *Ico* and *SOTC* would be nice, too.
PS3, SCE

LA Noire



Rockstar kept hush-hush about its open-world detective thriller at E3, but with an October release date on the cards, we're hoping to squeeze out more juice soon.
360, PS3, ROCKSTAR

Link to the past

Why shouldn't Nintendo mine its back catalogue?



If you listen to the way some critics talk about it, you'd think Nintendo was foolish for wheeling out the same big names again and again – but is brand originality overrated when gaming constantly reinvents itself?

Everybody knew it was coming – a new *Zelda* game was inevitable. And yet the announcement can't have disappointed many. To outsiders, it may seem like blind fandom, as though gamers are simply willing to consume the same things over and over again. But the truth is that gaming has historically enforced change even in its most perennial brands.

Asking for more, be it from *Zelda*, *Metroid* or *Mario*, has a legitimacy in gaming that it doesn't in other media. If a book or a film wheeled out the same characters with the frequency that the *Zelda* series does – and so often pitted in the same battles, involved in the same relationships – it would be accused of the most profound imaginative stagnation. Yet with videogames, the technological march has enforced a continual recreation not only of its appearance, but also its action.

And so fandom has a place in gaming that would be deemed irrational elsewhere. The prospect of a *Shadow Of The Colossus* in HD, for example, is greeted with an awful lot more excitement and interest than the promise of, say, a newly remastered edition of Jaws. And yet, if so much of our willingness to fall in love with Hyrule repeatedly has been based on the constant flow of tech, you may wonder about Nintendo's strategy of holding back the tide.

Even with MotionPlus, Nintendo's console exists in much the same perceived technological space as it did when released. *Skyward Sword* throws in a bundle of innovations, but it is doing so with the basic tools with which we've long been accustomed. *Spirit Tracks* was in some ways a disappointment for this reason, our initial eagerness to recapture the joys of *Phantom Hourglass* running into the buffers of déjà vu.

Are we looking forward to a new *Zelda*? Of course. Our taster during E3 gave us plenty to wrestle with. But we're being careful with our expectations, while suppressing thoughts of just how much more vibrant the land of Hyrule would appear in high definition.

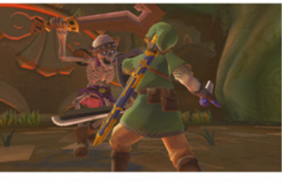
At the same time, though, Nintendo is bringing the likes of *StarFox 64* and *Ocarina Of Time* to 3DS, and we're keen to play them. On 3DS, they won't simply be about Nintendo reliving the past, as the company's critics would have it, but reviving it.



FORMAT: **WII**
PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **IN-HOUSE**
ORIGIN: **JAPAN**
RELEASE: **2011**

The Legend Of Zelda: Skyward Sword

The blade – and how it's wielded – becomes the star of the show in Nintendo's most complex Zelda to date





Why is the game called *Skyward Sword*? Charge the sword by holding it aloft and it will release the classic Master Sword beam of energy on its next strike

For a moment there it looked like Nintendo had actually fluffed it. Shigeru Miyamoto, having leapt on to Nintendo's E3 press conference stage to school the audience in *Skyward Sword*'s new control scheme, had huge difficulty in getting Link to do what he wanted. Could he really be demonstrating a game that exceeds Wii MotionPlus' technical limits?

Of course not. Apparently, even gaming's greatest heroes can be susceptible to the bane of wireless interference, for off the stage and in the hands, *Skyward Sword*'s motion controls are snappy, accurate and intuitive. The Remote drives Link's sword arm closely, performing the very sweeps and swipes that you do. It's no gimmick, however – the trick is a core element of *Skyward Sword*'s combat design: to defeat foes you must strike them at specific angles. Take Deku Babas, whose flapping maws open vertically or horizontally. Match your swing to their mouths and you'll kill them in one hit.



Skyward Sword's combat and control scheme are intricately and intelligently designed – and who'd expect anything less from Nintendo?

Other creatures mix it up a bit: a Moblin will hold its sword up to defend itself, while a skeleton warrior dual wields, holding its swords at varying angles for you to pick your moment and angle of attack carefully to get around its defence (which is reminiscent, rather neatly, of the way soldiers' swords would block your attacks in *A Link To The Past*). Combat's not all down to swordplay, though. Deku Scrubs require a little shield work, raised by holding up the Nunchuk. When they fire their nuts at you, jolt the Nunchuk forward to bounce them back.



The sword also opens doors locked with an eye symbol. The eye will track the blade as you wave it, becoming dizzy and falling off



Standing up to play *Skyward Sword*'s ten-minute demo, we found ourselves involved in the action, employing wide swings and exaggerated shield pushes, but it was clear that you can play with less dramatic movements sitting down. It's hard to imagine it possible to play while reclining, though, especially during the demo's culminating duel with a scorpion boss. Taking on its two pincers, which open to expose their weak points at different angles, requires targeting with Z and employing both sword to attack and shield to defend, while dodging with backflips and leaps to the side with the A button. It also exposes another sword attack, a thrust, which is necessary to finish off the creature once its claws are removed.

It was during this fight that the tumult of the action tended to challenge the precision of the controls – striking quickly to exploit the short windows of opportunity, we found ourselves failing to achieve the hits we intended, and landing those we hadn't. But then we aren't yet experienced swordsmen. More functionally, the controls are streamlined, making switching between equipment much faster and smoother than ever before. Holding B brings up a selection wheel with items that you can equip simply by motioning towards them with the Remote – you don't need to specifically point to an object to select it. Producer Eiji Aonuma says this is a nod to the difficulty presented in *Twilight Princess* in finding the pointer. Hitting the minus button, meanwhile, has Link instantly drink a health potion.

In terms of the items revealed so far, there's the return of the whip, which takes out or stuns smaller foes (but isn't effective against Moblins), lashes out to collect rupees and other items, and presumably allows Link to swing as it does in *Spirit Tracks*. The golden flying beetle is new, controlled by tilting the Remote in order to access distant areas and pick up items in its mandibles. The slingshot is broadly similar to that of old – its shots, fired by pressing A, fall in a distinct parabola. The bow, taking notes from the one in *Wii Sports Resort*, must be aimed by holding C for a short period before firing, while bombs can either be thrown (an arrow previewing their trajectory) or rolled.

While *Skyward Sword*'s controls represent the biggest evolution the console series has





By holding the A button you can have Link sprint until his stamina, illustrated with a circular gauge, runs out. The same gauge appears when you climb – a promise of *Colossus*-style challenges to come?

A hero of the floating world

Series producer Eiji Aonuma has expressed a desire to mix up the traditional structure of a *Zelda* game in *Skyward Sword* by using a dual-world conceit, but he's not prepared to express how quite yet. What we do know is that the story concerns Link, an inhabitant of an island floating in the sky called Skyloft. Link discovers that beneath the layer of clouds below his world is another realm. His adventure will play out as he flits back and forth between the two worlds – by what mechanic we couldn't say, but the freedom with which Link is depicted diving into the ether in *Skyward Sword*'s reveal trailer makes us hope for more than simply a set of portals.



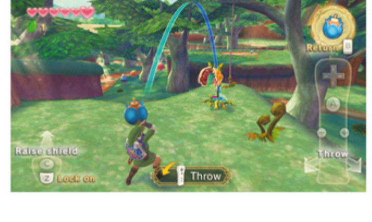




made since *Ocarina Of Time*, they also feel a natural part of the *Zelda* continuum. That, however, might also be why *Skyward Sword* feels just a little too familiar. Considering we've had the opportunity to play a brand new console *Zelda* – something that doesn't come along every day – its impact during E3 proves less powerful than expected.

Perhaps it's partly down to the graphics, which are beautiful, with distant views shimmering in an impressionistic dapple of colour. Up close, though, Link is similar in form to his *Twilight Princess* guise but half cel-shaded, in effect looking like something of a compromise with *Wind Waker*'s much more striking, and bold, visual design.

And maybe it's because the demo, confined to a few areas closely tuned to demonstrate Link's new toys and moves, cannot communicate the hopefully epic world he'll be traversing. The story is sketchily drawn so far (see 'A hero of the floating world'), and the way the sky world and the one below will mesh together – could it be as intricate a relationship as that between *A Link To The Past*'s Light and Dark worlds? – is a mystery.



What we do know is that *Skyward Sword*'s combat and control scheme are intricately and intelligently designed – and who'd expect anything less from Nintendo? As for what lies beyond the demo's forest clearings, no doubt we'll be treated to some in-depth reveals soon, at which point the potential of this new *Zelda* will become more evident.



Bomb rolling allows Link to blow up targets inside small holes, as well as taking advantage of certain Deku Babas' suicidal tendency to eat them. Aonuma says that the enemies are designed in an exaggerated way to emphasise their motions so players can see how and when to attack

FORMAT: **WII**
PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **NINTENDO/TEAM NINJA**
ORIGIN: **JAPAN**
RELEASE: **AUGUST 31**



Metroid: Other M

In space, no one can hear your introspective cutscenes



Unskippable cutscenes are a controversial design choice, and would be suicidal in the time-sensitive environs of E3 for anyone but Nintendo, where one of the three (lengthy) queues snaking around its booth was just for *Metroid: Other M*. Patrons waited up to three hours to watch 15 minutes of cutscenes and play (if lucky) five minutes of tutorial if they were foolish enough to not continue the game of the previous player.

Suffice it to say, *Other M* is heavy on story, continuing directly from *Super Metroid* with a shell-shocked Samus attempting to deal with her surprising sense of loss over the death of the 'baby' Metroid with which she had bonded, and the earlier scars from an (unexplained) situation that led to her leaving the Galactic Federation military. The game sees Samus become more like her cinematic inspiration, the Alien series' Ripley, and while this distinctly hands-off approach to storytelling is jarring, there's a welcome depth to a character who has until now been little more than something to fill a spacesuit or the occasional bikini.

When you're given the chance, play feels uniquely different. Controlled by holding the Remote horizontally, Samus responds so intuitively you could question the existence of the Nunchuk completely. Camera angles alter from room to room, changing *Other M* from feeling like a thirdperson title to a side-scroller and back again while never losing full 3D movement. And though Samus' aiming can be awkward (the only way to directly aim shots in 3D space is to switch to firstperson by aiming the Remote at the screen), it never stops feeling like a *Metroid* title, with frequent upgrading, exploration and backtracking required to progress.

Should *Other M*'s cutscene-to-play ratio be better balanced across the game than in its first hour, expect Team Ninja's *Metroid* game to reach the heights of Retro Studios' debut *Prime* title.



In a departure from previous *Metroid* titles, locations don't feel too claustrophobic. Outdoor levels offer a degree of freedom unseen in previous instalments







There's a tangible sense of weight when controlling Samus, a reminder that she's wearing a heavy spacesuit. The character's physical responsiveness is very satisfying

Golden Sun: Dark Dawn

Another DS fantasy RPG – but can it stand out in a top-down crowd?

FORMAT: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **CAMELOT SOFTWARE**
ORIGIN: **JAPAN**
RELEASE: **Q4 2010**

From *Dark Dawn*'s turn-based battles to the cod-medieval towns, it's clear we're in ye olde RPG territory. And its touchscreen controls and puzzles? *Phantom Hourglass*. This is the blended coffee of RPGs. And that's not necessarily a bad thing: the two previous *Golden Sun* games on GBA were deep experiences, missing only a touch of originality in the fantasy setting of Weyard. A generation after those, everything's gone wrong again and, playing as the children of the original game's characters, you've got to step up and sort it.

The turn-based battling is standard fare but, as in previous series entries, it's spiced up by your character's 'Djinn'. These are elemental beings found in the wild that, once captured, can be attached to a specific character, affecting their character class (stats) and battle capabilities. They can also be active or on standby: the first state enables those stat boosts and certain Djinn-enabled attacks, while the second sacrifices the overall package in favour of a whacking great summon attack. In the GBA games it was a system of considerable flexibility, thanks to intra-party combinations and the sheer number of Djinns to find, and it's the same case here.

The puzzle sections are obviously limited by the nature of an E3 demo, serving merely to confirm that the touchscreen controls work nicely, and that we still remember how to put a pillar in an obvious indentation. Fire is also in evidence, used to destroy bushes, but surely there are more interesting combinations to come.

As part of the Christmas schedule *Golden Sun* will be overshadowed, and what we've seen of it doesn't suggest a true original so much as a competent mix of genre staples. But there's that Djinn system, and it's allied to a bright visual style and the promise of a good old-fashioned adventure. So while *Dark Dawn* isn't what you'd call a Christmas Day event, it might be just the ticket for the long evenings around it.



The announcement of this game will have been a relief for series fans – a hoax third instalment was 'revealed' at E3 2007







The character sprites of the previous *Golden Suns* have been abandoned in favour of cleanly designed 3D models









FORMAT: **WII**
PUBLISHER: **DISNEY**
DEVELOPER: **JUNCTION POINT STUDIOS**
ORIGIN: **US**
RELEASE: **CHRISTMAS**
PREVIOUSLY IN: **E209**

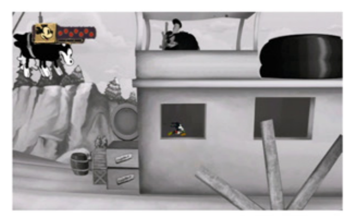
Epic Mickey

More from Mickey's mousecapade, in which playstyle matters

It's when you see a game like *Epic Mickey* that you realise just how difficult it might be to create a game for Disney and its vast, varied audience and starring the House of Mouse's most precious property. Because, on the surface, *Epic Mickey* is a breezy 3D platformer, with levels and collectibles and characters to chat to – the sort of thing developers have been creating since *Super Mario 64*.

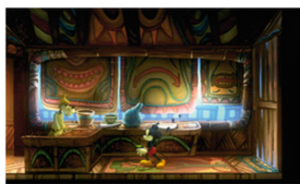
Epic Mickey's clear achievement is that, under the surface and whether its ambitious plan works out or not, it's a lot more complicated. **Warren Spector** (one of gaming's most precious properties) is producing a game that continues the exploration of player choice on which he embarked all the way back in the early '90s at Origin with the *Ultima* series, and later with *Deus Ex*. With Mickey's ability to either 'paint' new elements into the world, or 'thin' existing elements away, Spector and his team have given players a range of choices to tackle its puzzles and challenges.

The game also dynamically changes the way characters behave towards Mickey, how much paint and thinner stock you have, and the nature of his guardian (a sprite which follows Mickey around) depending on whether you tend to paint, or create, your way to success, or thin – "solving in the most direct manner" in Spector's words. Paint, and your guardian may turn enemies into friends; thin, and it may erase them. But there's no good and evil here – as Spector says, "The guardians support your playstyle, and they're an onscreen representation of the kind of hero that Mickey is."



The side-viewed Steamboat Willie level will ring a bell with anyone who played the 16bit game *Mickey Mania*







What's currently unclear is how free you'll be to spread paint or thinner around the levels. Elements that you can affect look different to those you can't, but we fear the distinction feeling arbitrary

Kirby's Epic Yarn

Nintendo's pink blob returns in the first game based on string theory

FORMAT: **WII**
PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **GOOD-FEEL/ HAL LABORATORY**
ORIGIN: **JAPAN**

With ten years passing since the last *Kirby* platforming game on a home console (the last being *Kirby 64: The Crystal Shards*), you would almost expect that HAL Laboratory's pink blob would return in a title that follows the trend of the last ten years – bigger, better, more.

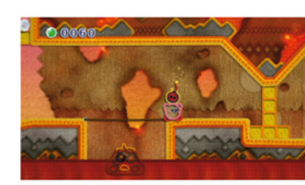
So it's surprising to find that for his return, coded by *Wario Land: The Shake Dimension* developer Good-Feel, Kirby has actually managed to lose his most famous ability, the one that he's had since his very first appearance in 1992 – the ability to inhale enemies and either spit them out or absorb their powers.

Not to say, of course, that Kirby isn't still able. The twist with *Epic Yarn* is that he is made of, well, strands of yarn, and his world – created out of thick, brightly coloured fabrics and felt – looks like it's been glued together carefully by a primary school class. Instead of sucking up enemies, Kirby now attacks by turning his arm into a yarn whip, he 'dashes' by turning himself into a yarn car, and under (fabric) water he's a yarn submarine.

It's all terribly adorable, but even in a series that, of all Nintendo's titles, has been skewed toward the youngest, *Epic Yarn* feels particularly simplistic, with levels a comfortable and cute jaunt to the end without a whiff of challenge. The addition of a new (so far unnamed) protagonist for a second player doesn't help matters, turning the game into the often disagreeable mess that *New Super Mario Bros Wii* could feel, regularly bumping into your fellow player or getting into arguments over which character gets to throw the other.

Epic Yarn doesn't feel like a triumphant return for a beloved franchise but simply something Nintendo felt was overdue (a new Kirby has been in development since 2005). The gorgeous art style will rightly win many converts, but we're hoping there's more depth still to be stitched in.

Kirby can still capture enemies, turning them into a ball of yarn that can be thrown. Among his forms is an anvil that can drop from the sky to crush whatever's below





Dinosaurs, gigantic plants, water levels, lava levels and even an enormous phoenix-like yarn bird are seen in the game screens released so far

FORMAT: **PS3**
PUBLISHER: **SONY**
DEVELOPER: **GUERRILLA GAMES**
ORIGIN: **THE NETHERLANDS**
RELEASE: **2011**

Killzone 3

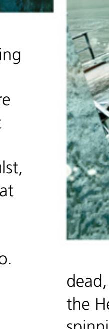
Guerrilla's unforgiving future shooter gets a new armoury, fresh vehicles and a fashionable 3D makeover

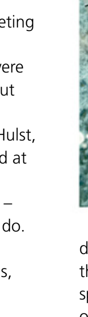




Seemingly moments after completing last year's flawed but explosive *Killzone 2*, the Guerrilla team were already at their keyboards hammering out the foundations of its successor. The company's managing director, Hermen Hulst, has spoken about how the studio looked at what Sony's other teams were doing – namely *Uncharted 2* and *God Of War III* – and realised it had some catching up to do. Levels ten times larger than those in the previous games, as well as new weapons, more vehicles and, crucially, 3D support are the key elements in the plan.

The story kicks off right after the close of the previous game. Emperor Visari is dead, but far from breaking the will of the Helghast it has simply opened up a spinning power vortex, with no shortage of candidates to step in. Hence the ISA must now fight for its very existence, up against a gigantic enemy force packing weapons of mass destruction and overhauled AI. The desolate, inhospitable wasteland that is Helghan appears to have spawned an ever-lasting war.





The frozen wasteland levels of the game (above) feature abandoned rigs and tankers for close-quarters fighting. Once again, players will be able to man machine-gun posts (above left) in order to unload devastating fire

Indeed, the continuity of the series was more than obvious in Guerrilla's E3 demo. It showed an early mission in which a group of ISA dropships launch a raid on a Helghast base in a cluster of decommissioned oil rigs. The Arctic tundra setting with its graveyard of collapsed machinery instantly recalls the industrial environments of *Killzone 2*. Flying in, players get to shoot the legs from several rigs, watching them crumple into a mass of ruptured metal as gigantic pipes fall and crush multiple platforms – so you can tick destructible environments on the checklist of features, too. To accentuate this, there's a range of new heavy weapons including the WASP rocket launcher that spits out multiple guided nukes.

On the ground, combat has the familiar *Killzone* feel: unforgiving and relentless. Bullets ping overhead in deadly showers as Helghast troops swarm over the battered landscape. The updated AI is evidenced in their movement, criss-crossing between cover points and encircling the player position. The fact that the levels are larger this time also means that you'll find multiple routes through to the mission objective, allowing a more flowing combat experience than the usual corridor-of-death-style reliance on phased linear chokepoints. Furthermore, the fact players are likely to be able to stumble upon unwary enemies this time around means close combat will be more important, hence a rebuilt melee system that lets players bring down troops with a rifle butt to the face or knees, crunching



The Helghast jetpacks bring extra aerial threat, though players will be able to requisition these handy flying machines for themselves. They come equipped with reasonably simple controls and a minigun for strafing







Helghast AI has been improved this time round. The old 'stop, duck and shoot' mechanic looks to have been replaced with a more fluid approach, the troopers darting from cover to cover, looking to surround the player



It looks as if Guerrilla will be making use of its renowned lighting engine to guide the player through the more desolate environments. Amid the blinding frost of the tundra setting, we're at least given a couple of orange glows to aim at

kicks and punches, and then bone-cracking finishing moves.

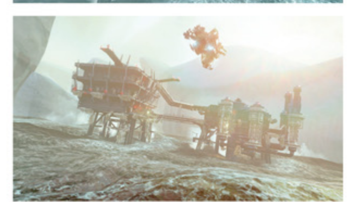
Stereoscopic 3D delivers a new layer of atmosphere to Guerrilla's dark sci-fi world, bringing a fine sense of depth and solidity to the action. The rear of your gun feels like it protrudes from the screen, its glowing LED ammo display hovering just below your eye line, while bullet cases fly up, chunky and bright, into your sightline. Meanwhile, in the distance you can see light beams breaking in circular patterns through the grey cloud masses. The blood effect is also worth noting, spraying messily across your field of vision whenever you're hit, lending a reddish hue to the action going on behind it.

Importantly, the 3D effect is generally beneficial to gameplay. When enemy troops are in the distance and darting between cover they are less tricky to pick out from inanimate objects – a key point when everything is rendered using such a muted palette. Similarly, as bullet and rocket fire comes in, it's easier to judge its direction and threat level from the angle of the vapour trails. Meanwhile, the game's intriguing new vehicular addition, the jetpack, is considerably easier to pilot with a 3D landscape around you. (How those who can't yet afford to upgrade to expensive new TVs will feel about all this is another story, of course.)

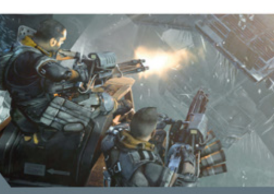
> Guerrilla has promised plenty of scenic variety. There are missions that take place in jungle areas and, apparently, the finale of the game will take the battle into space

For those concerned about playing another *Killzone* title set in frozen grey wastelands, Guerrilla has promised plenty of scenic variety. There are missions that take place within Helghan's jungle areas and, apparently, the finale of the game will take the battle into space. In truth, though, *Killzone 3* looks to be a continuation of the series' bleak aesthetic, with new toys to play with, some re-tuned effects and, of course, the addition of stereoscopic 3D. In a shooter market densely crowded with competitors – including the notionally similar *Crysis 2* (also due in 3D) and *Bulletstorm* – you wonder if this will be enough to interest anyone outside of the series' current fanbase, but if the aerial element is extensive enough to lend the game a new dimension, *Killzone 3* might yet offer up some surprises.





Yes, more snow, ice flurries and cold, desolate action. To be fair, Helghan has seen its share of nuclear destruction, and all this should contrast well with the jungle environments we're promised later in the game



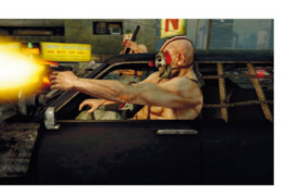
Audio all around

Guerrilla isn't just planning to bring 3D technology to visuals. The company is making use of high dynamic range audio, which allows dynamic, context-sensitive positioning of sound effects, to create a more convincing and dramatic depth of field. When an explosion hits right next to the player, for example, the theory is it'll drown out everything else, from music to dialogue. It's an effect that DICE has also implemented into the Frostbite engine, and it's employed to convincing effect in the *Battlefield: Bad Company* games.

FORMAT: **PS3**
PUBLISHER: **SONY**
DEVELOPER: **EAT SLEEP PLAY, INC**
ORIGIN: **US**
RELEASE: **2011**

Twisted Metal

A return to battle racing with the enduring PlayStation series



If there's ever a console that makes it clear there's an ocean between the UK and the US, it's PlayStation. In Europe, PlayStation cool was defined by *Wipeout*'s tight track racing and electronica; in the US, *Twisted Metal*'s wide-open car combat and crunching rock. It's no surprise that the rapturous response from the audience at Sony's E3 briefing for one of the most bizarre spectacles seen at this year's E3 – David Jaffe being driven on stage in a Sweet Tooth ice cream van – was almost entirely the response of the North American press, one that had already been successfully bamboozled by flat-out denials from Jaffe that he was working on a new title in the series (something he seems rather proud about, crowing on Twitter: "I'm amazed some journos act like I owe them the truth").

Heavily online-oriented, the new *Twisted Metal* promises up to 16-player online modes with players picking not an individual character but membership in a 'faction' (with the Sweet Tooth-inspired Clowns vs the Dollface-inspired Dolls on offer in the demo) and taking part in team battles including a Nuke mode that requires players to work together to kidnap the enemy faction's leader in order to launch a nuke at their opponent's statue (along with the usual variety of deathmatch modes.)



Developer Eat Sleep Play was formed by *God Of War* director David Jaffe in 2007 and has previous in The *Twisted Metal* franchise having ported 2008's *Head On* from PSP (see E150 for our review) to PS2. The improved online capabilities of PS3 via PSN should lead to a more satisfying experience this time

Featuring bikes, cars and helicopters, *Twisted Metal* was shown at a 'pre-alpha' stage of development, but its multiplayer modes gave us exactly what the series is known for – fast, scrappy and often random vehicular combat that's a riot of destruction without much finesse. For fans, that's going to be more than enough, especially with a full singleplayer and twoplayer co-op modes promised. But if you grew up with *Wipeout* as your defining image of PlayStation style, *Twisted Metal* feels entirely out of place in the PS3 line-up. A bit like an ice cream van at a press briefing, in fact.







Chainsaws, as modelled by Arthur Brown (top), can be charged up against the road for additional damage



FORMAT: **PS3**
PUBLISHER: **SONY**
DEVELOPER: **POLYPHONY DIGITAL**
ORIGIN: **JAPAN**
RELEASE: **NOVEMBER**

Gran Turismo 5

It's been a long while coming – but engineering perfection takes time

E3's show floor is far from the ideal place to experience new games, which makes it odd that the problem with previewing *Gran Turismo 5* is not that myriad distractions made the experience less than it should have been, but that only being allowed to experience it in a full set-up with racing car seat, wheel and 3D glasses means it's worlds away from the likely experience of any but the richest, most dedicated fans. Because no matter how realistic the experience of *Gran Turismo 5* is – and it's clear that aside from full force-feedback, with the right set-up it's as close to driving a supercar as you can imagine – there's an elephant in the room, and that elephant is Turn 10's *Forza Motorsport 3*.

Gran Turismo 5 is as unforgiving a game as it's always been. Difficult to get into, slow to give you the cars you really want to drive, hard to play well, and (so far) offering little in terms of ways to connect with the larger *Gran Turismo* community, outside of 16-player online races. The problem is, of course, that all these issues have been *Forza Motorsport*'s strengths, and with the most recent game in the series it's managed to come close to Polyphony Digital's strongholds of car detail and general graphical beauty.

However, when it hits shelves there'll be almost a thousand cars in *Gran Turismo 5* (*Forza* offers less than half of that), each with a damage model. And the 3D, should you have a TV that supports it, is natural and thrilling from the in-car view (which we'd argue is the only way to experience it).

Gran Turismo's angle has always been one of exclusivity, anyway. Those who are up to the challenge it offers, or who have enough money for the full 3D cockpit experience, will find it peerless.



Sony's promo shots reveal plenty of supercars, such as this McLaren F1 (above), but part of the thrill of *Gran Turismo* has always been tuning a more reasonably priced car to ridiculous levels with three-stage turbos, racing tyres and a new diff to win the race



The full 3D experience is likely to be out of the price range of many players, but it still looks splendid in 2D





Each of the three story characters arrives in the game under unique circumstances. The rookie, a festival fanboy, stows away on the carrier ship before racing into action

MotorStorm Apocalypse

A shaky start for this rumble in the urban jungle – hopefully just a case of the E3 jitters

Suspension of disbelief must be a prerequisite of seeing *MotorStorm* at E3. If it's not prerendered footage of what the game supposedly is, it's a misfiring demo of what it supposedly isn't. *MotorStorm Apocalypse*, we're told, will take all the open and emergent battle racing you'd expect to a world-ending scale, with its urban tracks ripping apart in dynamic and unpredictable ways. Why, then, is the game we're shown such a straightforward dash through a scene from a movie, about which almost everything feels wrong?

It takes place, as you've probably heard, in the series' most chaotic venue yet. A chain of earthquakes is slowly but surely wiping out a city, and the MotorStorm festival is there to give nature a hand. With 48 hours left before the place is no more, three of its drivers (one for each difficulty level) have to race through the shadows of falling skyscrapers, collapsed subway stations, ad-hoc raceways and tumbling bridges before making their escape.

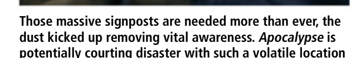
So *Apocalypse* has something unique in modern racers: a timetable. Its three narrative-led campaigns snake through a series of irreversible events, one stage's skyline becoming a later race's rubble. When a route becomes impassable, a more implausible one takes its place. Rooftops, office spaces, tunnels, walls: no surface or angle is considered off-limits. Then there are the crooks and weirdos still living there – a private military company called Dusklight; a feral tribe called the Crazies – who add bullets, wrecking balls and bodies to the mix. It's a dramatic U-turn in how *MotorStorm* operates: rather than the racers chewing up the scenery, it's now the other way round.

To be fair to the demo, most of this stuff is in there, in realtime. Buildings keel into each other and shower the racers with glass, their electrics flickering. A subway caves in, turning the road above into an entry ramp. If you dare, you can slip between the wheels of a juggernaut's trailer, *Lotus Turbo Challenge 2*-style. Bodies thump off bonnets left and right, making you wonder if the game could ever be released in the ill-timed event of an actual devastating earthquake.

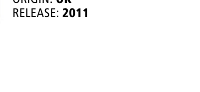
None of this is much fun. Without even a hint of dynamic pathfinding nor the scenery to support it, the only apparent choice in this demo is a perfunctory three-way split between an exit ramp and two symmetrical side roads, neither offering variety or advantage. The only playable vehicle class is the car, arguably the runt of the series' litter. There's little room for manoeuvre, and even less for error – *MotorStorm*'s lust for carnage has simply driven it into anarchy. The chain of scripted events looks ancient thanks to *Split/Second: Velocity*, as do the nitrous gauge, the fatal overheating and the subsequent flashing reset.

The game's sprawling multiplayer component, Wreckreation, sounds fresh and exciting (see 'Logic circuits'). However, the game suggested by this demo is neither of those things. As much as *MotorStorm* thrives on conflict, it could probably do without that one.

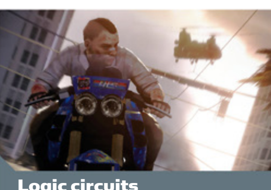




Those massive signposts are needed more than ever, the dust kicked up removing vital awareness. *Apocalypse* is potentially courting disaster with such a volatile location

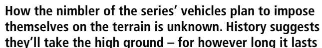


FORMAT: **PS3**
PUBLISHER: **SCEE**
DEVELOPER: **EVOLUTION**
ORIGIN: **UK**
RELEASE: **2011**



Logic circuits

The multiplayer component of *Apocalypse* is almost baffling in scope. A parser-based game mode creation tool enables you to rewrite the rules, with Evolution claiming that anything logical will go. If you want buildings to topple when a certain number of cars pass a checkpoint, your wish is the game's command. Online races support up to 16 players, with four on the same console thanks to splitscreen support. Vehicle customisation includes body shells, vinyls, stickers, paint jobs and flags, while performance upgrades include combat abilities, boost and handling. A towering set of modes, then, but a lack of strong foundations could turn them to rubble.



How the nimbler of the series' vehicles plan to impose themselves on the terrain is unknown. History suggests they'll take the high ground – for however long it lasts

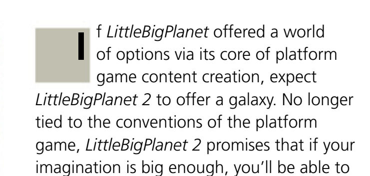


FORMAT: **PS3**
PUBLISHER: **SCEE**
DEVELOPER: **MEDIA MOLECULE**
ORIGIN: **UK**
RELEASE: **NOVEMBER**
PREVIOUSLY IN: **E215**

LittleBigPlanet 2

Back to the planet for more games, more charm, and more Stephen Fry





If *LittleBigPlanet* offered a world of options via its core of platform game content creation, expect *LittleBigPlanet 2* to offer a galaxy. No longer tied to the conventions of the platform game, *LittleBigPlanet 2* promises that if your imagination is big enough, you'll be able to create games from 3D shooters to realtime strategy, and even (whisper it) games that don't feature Sackboy as the protagonist.

The possibilities lie in Media Molecule's subtle yet massive expansion to its creativity tools. While the interface is much the same – complex, yet quickly intuitive – the potential is massively increased by allowing players access to things that had previously required laboured workarounds. Using new 'circuit boards' which can be attached to any objects in the world, not only can chips be added that allow players to directly control objects via any button on the pad (right down to individual stick axes) but logic gates allow rudimentary – or potentially not-so-rudimentary – AI wherever a player requires. Indeed, within the space of a few minutes we had managed to knock up a small spaceship that Sackboy was able to fly around the screen – once we'd worked out that we'd accidentally glued it to the floor, that is.

And things which had been almost completely hidden from the player – such as camera controls or placement – are now also fully in their hands, allowing you to not only recast *LittleBigPlanet* as a top-down title but also create elaborate cutscenes with timed shots.

It's clear from even a few minutes with *LittleBigPlanet 2*'s creator tools that with time and effort almost anything is possible. If there's a problem, it's the same that faced its predecessor: with so many possibilities, even the simplest designs require more perseverance than many can muster, and those that can will, most likely, rely on simply aping other games as far as they can without being moderated out. Prospective *LBP2* fans would do well to get down to some serious planning in the time between now and November.



One major addition to the game comes in the form of Sackbots, NPCs whose AI can be controlled by the player when making levels, with programmable routines slotting in along with custom costumes



The singleplayer plot seems to involve saving the world from some sort of space vacuum cleaner. Expect a wry explanation by returning narrator Stephen Fry



FORMAT: **PS3**
PUBLISHER: **SCE**
DEVELOPER: **THATGAMECOMPANY**
ORIGIN: **US**
RELEASE: **2011**

Journey

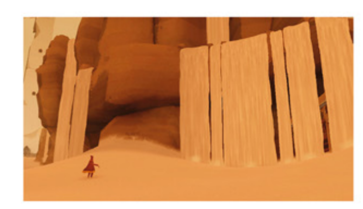
An online multiplayer game designed to make you feel small

Not many games can trace roots to a meeting with a former space shuttle pilot. When thatgamecompany co-founder **Jenova Chen** had lunch with Charles F Bolden Jr, he discovered that many people who've visited the moon become religious or embark on humanitarian projects. Why? "On the moon you realise everything you care about is on a marble above you," Chen says. "You feel small and wonder what else is out there." With technology like the internet, mobile communication and jet travel we've forgotten, says Chen, what astronauts learn: the feeling of being small.

Journey, to a certain extent, is intended to address this theme. Thatgamecompany's first attempt at a multiplayer game, it has the player move through a sandy wasteland filled with mysterious ruins. In fact, most of the game remains rather mysterious. Though the developer's two previous games, *Flow* and *Flower*, were controlled almost exclusively using tilt controls, *Journey* employs the stick to move the character and buttons to jump and sing ("Or shout – it's not finalised," says Chen") while tilt moves the camera.

As with *Flower*, *Journey* features striking graphic effects, this time to simulate sand. It subtly tumbles, cascades and ripples in waves, while the character leaves a trail and is able to 'surf' down inclines. Progress is down to solving environmental puzzles. We see a large area featuring a long but broken viaduct. Chen guides his character to a series of flapping cloths ascribed with patterns and jumps on them – they bear his weight. Their pattern changes and lengths of cloth appear on the viaduct, spanning its broken sections.

The multiplayer aspect comes – if you opt in – with the appearance of other players in the land, though Chen is not yet revealing how they will affect play. The aim, though, is "to bring a unique emotional experience to online play". Even though we know so little about *Journey* so far, its developer's pedigree makes it one to watch.



Cloth can be walked on, allows the character to fly for short distances, and can be touched to 'harmonise' with, triggering various events in the environment



The apparent aim is to reach a towering mountain which always appears in the far distance. It's not known at this stage if you'll ever actually get there or not

FORMAT: **360**
PUBLISHER: **MICROSOFT**
DEVELOPER: **BUNGIE**
ORIGIN: **US**
RELEASE: **SEPTEMBER**
PREVIOUSLY IN: **E211**

Halo: Reach

Bungie aims high, and ensures an enduring legacy





Reach **ships with the extraordinary community features we expect from a** ***Halo*** **game, so you can save shots like this for your family. Theatre and Forge were revealed for** ***Halo 3*** **at the last minute, so there may yet be more**



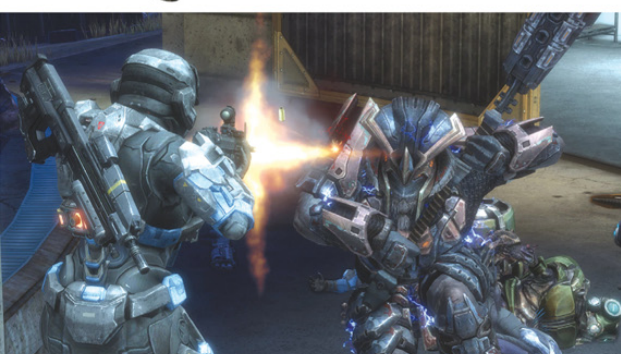
Despite its repeatedly stated ambitions to make its final *Halo* its best, a human tale separate from the heroics of Master Chief, the recent *Reach* beta proved that Bungie has understandably held back from radical reinvention – mindful, no doubt, of messing with what's still one of the most successful FPS franchises.

The ground-level conflict still feels like the *Halo* we know so well; the greatest change comes when the jetpacks take us into the air. At Microsoft's E3 conference it went a step further, and took us to the stars.

First came a pitched battle across open ground, bringing to mind the broad battlegrounds of the original *Combat Evolved*. The fighting in an enclosed base demonstrated new remote-detonated grenades, ideal for getting behind the shields of enemies, and a new up-close execution takedown. The ground forces dealt with, it was time to saddle up new multi-stage rocket the Sabre and blast into orbit to defend a space station against Banshees and other craft high above the planet's surface.

Having discarded the main boosters, it became a more manoeuvrable fighter seemingly equipped with a version of the standard recharging shield plus blasters and homing rockets. Flight appears optimised for the existing skillset, handled by twin-stick controls and temporary boost, with flamboyant moves mapped to a button.

> The fighting in an enclosed base demonstrated remote-detonated grenades, ideal for getting behind the shields of enemies, and a new up-close execution takedown



The bonky stick, as it's known in the Edge office, at operational range. In the context of fan-authored modes like Grifball (a very fine creation), the new kit's non-combat possibilities in custom games are mouthwatering





We came down with a bump, in both senses of the phrase, as later, behind closed doors, it was revealed that this is just a small part of the game: while low-orbit combat is considered a core element, it will only appear in one mission in the campaign and not at all in multiplayer – save in the respect that all four members of Noble Team can participate in the co-op mode of the main campaign.

The other addition revealed for E3 was Firefight, the co-operative Horde mode onslaught adored in *ODST* yet despised in equal measure for its failure to support Xbox Live matchmaking. Bungie has repeatedly stated this was a regrettable shortcoming caused by that title's anaemic development resource; now it returns fully featured under



Share the pain

To the game's still-peerless creation tools – the mighty Forge level editor was also confirmed to be returning – is added the ability to share custom gametypes on Bungie.net. With such a huge range of options available, this offers vast potential for the community to craft entirely new modes and experiences. Indeed, Bungie is even expecting it: cherished modes will be selected and promoted to matchmaking if deemed to be good enough.

Creations should live on long after Bungie has moved on to its next project with Activision; the team is keen to stress that the game will be supported, and Bungie.net maintained, long after it has passed the game back to Microsoft's new *Halo* guardians at internal studio 343 Industries.

the name Firefight 2.0, supporting the active rosters, queue joining and other new matchmaking features.

In the process, it has refined the experience from an unending slog into something more manageable; the waves of enemies can now be assigned specific time and skill limits rather than continuing until interest or bladder capacity run out. The customisation options are extensive, affording control over everything from player abilities and weapon loadouts to the type, frequency and behaviour of enemies.

While the full variety of options wasn't available for testing, the two on offer were enough to reveal that the mode has lost none of its appeal. Camaraderie is swiftly enforced as the team soaks up the waves of attackers from behind limited cover, dividing attention between the flanks and scooting out to scavenge weapons whenever there is a break in the fighting – the battlefield cast-offs joined by aerial drops of superior tools. The heavens can also deliver airstrikes using the new Target Locator.

Group work is further encouraged by a new area-of-effect healing shield deployed by the medic, as does the Rocketfight gametype: by giving each player limitless rockets, it makes organised ceasefires much more important between each wave.

All was delivered with the justified confidence we've come to expect from the series, including the tantalising hints at other, bigger features to come for both single- and multiplayer. As Bungie enters its last few months with the series it raised to greatness, it's clear that its last word will be an emphatic one.



You can still play vanilla Firefight ('Classic'), while other modes include a base defence against the waves and Rocketfight, which, as you might expect, is a little bit explosive















The script for *Gears Of War 3* has been written by Karen Traviss, the author of several novels inspired by the series as well as the Star Wars expanded universe. See edge-online.com for an extensive interview

FORMAT: **360**
PUBLISHER: **MICROSOFT**
DEVELOPER: **EPIC GAMES**
ORIGIN: **US**
RELEASE: **APRIL**

Gears Of War 3

Make way for the triumphant return of one man and his COG

Left 4 Dead is a strange inspiration for the team at Epic, and almost certainly not one Cliff Bleszinski would admit to, but with *Gears Of War 3* featuring not only a fourplayer co-op mode but the new Beast multiplayer mode pitching (CPU) COGs against player-controlled versions of the Locust's most inhuman warriors (from Tickers to Beserkers), it is undeniable that Valve's title has changed the online potential of shooters as vastly as *Modern Warfare*.

And yet *Gears Of War 3* is as uniquely bombastic and brutal as the series has always been. While it seems far too likely to continue down the dangerously awkward attempts at engendering an emotional response seen in *Gears 2,* the new game's battles are only bigger and better than ever, with a team of four working together requiring that enemies work to deny them the chance to get comfortable behind cover and heavier, more cinematic direction. New weapons, too, only become more violent – a lancer with a bayonet that somehow manages more gruesome kills than one mounted with a chainsaw, and the perennial favourite of the FPS player, the double-barrelled shotgun.

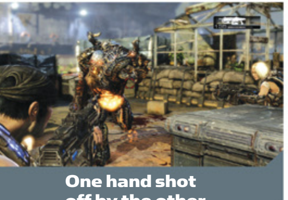
Simply from a short hands-off preview with Bleszinski you can see why *Gears* is reaching a level of cultural phenomenon that may even eclipse that of *Halo*; important enough to be announced on Jimmy Fallon's late-night TV talk show, relevant enough that a tweet announcing that rising Canadian rapper Drake will star as COG Jace Stratton can go viral.

And hands-on with Beast mode it's no different. Well, that's a lie – it is an entirely different beast to play, but every bit the *Gears* experience that has proven so engaging to so many. As a member of the Locust Horde you gain experience across the course of a single game allowing you to upgrade what you spawn as, and a clear class selection screen allows players to co-ordinate into groups of squealing Wretches or Boomers flanked with Grenadier Elites. Just like Horde mode, it compels players to work together in a way that team deathmatch doesn't, and promises a long-lived experience for those already weaned on using *L4D2*'s special infected against squads of armed survivors.

Though it hasn't been announced if Beast mode's ideas will be further integrated into *Gears Of War 3*'s multiplayer, there's really no reason why the COG opponents must be CPU players, and it seems a decision (possibly) only made to distance *Gears Of War 3* from competitors. However, there's almost no reason. For good or bad, *Gears Of War* stands alone via its grotesque character design, overwrought writing but immensely satisfying play, and expect one hell of a deep impact when it hits in April next year.



Bleszinski says *Gears 3* will "answer many questions" about the series' world. We're not sure if we don't simply want to shoot lots of stuff



One hand shot off by the other

***Left 4 Dead* isn't the only apparent inspiration behind *Gears Of War 3*'s direction – with the Locust Horde having been infected by the vast amounts of imulsion spilled at the end of the previous game, the now 'Lambent' Horde have begun to mutate into grotesque monstrosities that require careful aim to destroy their weak points and shoot off their (many) disturbing protrusions and limbs.**

Although more or less a direct lift of *Dead Space*'s key design innovation, many would consider it a fair trade, as Visceral Games' title would have played almost entirely like *Gears Of War* if it weren't for that dismembering twist.

FORMAT: **360, MAC, PC, PS3**
PUBLISHER: **EA, VALVE**
DEVELOPER: **VALVE**
ORIGIN: **US**
RELEASE: **2011**

Portal 2

Valve's firstperson puzzler gets more plot and a splash of paint

That an entire third of Valve's E3 presentation is given over to *Portal 2*'s story sends a spark racing through our Worrying personality core.

Valve may be a master of the art, but its mastery has always been in near seamless integration of narrative and action. *Portal* never diverted you from its brilliant, physics-defying spatial puzzles to force narrative upon you – it was in the levels' detail, in GLaDOS's sinister quips. The years that have passed between the two games are written in the encroachment of foliage and decay on the once pristine Aperture Science facility. Yet *Portal 2* dares to be less subtle too: during our demo we're treated to a monologue from a cockney personality module before progress is permitted – diverging from the sense of isolation touted by the first game.

But Valve may be damned if it does and damned if it doesn't – it would be hard to keep up *Portal*'s relentless pace over the course of a longer sequel. Narrative diversions may provide the necessary break, regardless of how intrusive they initially feel. Elsewhere, there seems to be no slowing of invention: *Portal 2* has new toys aplenty. 'Excursion Funnels' are spiralling anti-gravity beams that slowly convey their contents away from an emitter. 'Pneumatic Diversity Vents' create a powerful suction that, combined with judicious portal placement, can hoover up a room full of security bots and rip the plating from the walls.

Then there are springboards – known as 'Faith Plates' in GLaDOS's euphemistic idiom – and 'Thermal Discouragement Beams' which can be deflected using special variants of the Companion Cube, and used to power switches or fry robotic foes.

The next slew of ideas comes courtesy of Valve's acquisition of another group of graduates from the DigiPen Institute of Technology. Just as *Portal* originally grew from the student project *Narbacular Drop*, so do *Portal 2*'s physics-altering paints find their origin in *Tag: The Power Of Paint* – a project that went on to win the Independent Games Festival Student Showcase award in 2009. Faucets splurt large globs of paint into the test chambers, giving the surfaces they cover new properties. Coat something with blue 'Repulsion Gel' and it immediately bounces you away upon contact. Orange 'Propulsion Gel' increases your speed, allowing you to power down a long corridor before the spiked walls close in. Although not yet announced, *The Power Of Paint*'s toolset suggests that there may be a third variety that allows you to effortlessly traverse the vertical surfaces upon which it is splashed.

We wonder if going all Jackson Pollock might make levels extremely difficult to complete. There's no indication that you can hose the place down with turps, but it would be inconsistent with *Portal*'s neat ingenuity for any puzzle to require a reload – at least, not without killing you first.

Meanwhile, the Source engine's improvement continues apace, and the benefits of a larger development budget are clearly expressed in flourishes, such as the elegant way rooms reassemble themselves from hydraulic panels. But size is certainly still foremost among *Portal 2*'s challenges – Valve will have to be careful in how it chooses to extend the premise of a game so perfectly formed, lest it fall victim to having too much of a good thing.

PS3: hot air?

Gabe Newell's appearance at Sony's E3 conference was certainly a surprise of the magnitude Valve had teased in earlier press releases. While he didn't go so far as to retract his famous disdain for PS3 hardware, he did claim *Portal 2* would offer a better experience on PS3 because of integration with Steamworks. It's likely to mean that the PS3 version will receive speedier auto updates than the 360 version, plus community features and downloadable content at the same price as PC users. The use of Steamcloud could possibly permit you access to your saves on any console or PC. Valve devs also confirmed that the eventual plan is for crossplatform co-op.



Wheatley is a personality core which, attempting to help, accidentally resurrects GLaDOS. Wheatley's placeholder voice is supplied by Valve animator Richard Lord, whose English accent may be retained by popular demand





Chell returns, although she appears to have changed race, now appearing as Caucasian. She also exchanges her orange boiler suit for a futuristic one-piece and Biggles-like flying helmet





Driver: San Francisco

The series that began life as a sleek ride and then became a bit of a banger is looking shiny once more

FORMAT: **360, MAC, PC, PS3, WII**
PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT**
DEVELOPER: **UBISOFT REFLECTIONS**
ORIGIN: **UK**
RELEASE: **LATE 2010**

Defocused. That was the word Reflections founder Martin Edmondson uses to account for *Driver*'s dramatic fall from grace. *Grand Theft Auto III* has proven a difficult drug for developers and players alike to get out of their system over the last decade. Now, Reflections has chosen to refocus on life behind the wheel – and has devised an ingenious mechanic that will ensure you never have to leave your seat.

In the storyline (which takes place a few months after the events of *Driver 3*), Tanner temporarily slips into a coma following a scuffle with long-time nemesis Jericho and, as often happens with coma patients, gains the ability to transfer his mind into the body of another at will – a process known as Shift. The game is positioned a return to the series' roots, and this is demonstrated in the weighty, satisfying car handling. It also means that a wrong turn into oncoming traffic will halt progress and allow the quarry to flee. Previously, this would be the end of the car chase; now, it is only the beginning.

A press of X levitates the camera to an almost top-down perspective of the city. In this state, the action continues, albeit in slow-motion, with the AI taking control of Tanner's vehicle, if still mobile. From this angle, the player can highlight any NPC vehicle on the map and take control of it instantly. It is at first disorientating and seems at odds with the game's central premise, but with a bit of hands-on practice it soon becomes apparent what it's really about: keeping the player in the thick of the chase at all times. *Driver 2* debuted the concept of being able to get out of a car as a means to an end; Shift takes a knife to the extracurricular activities that defocused the series until all that's left to do is drive.

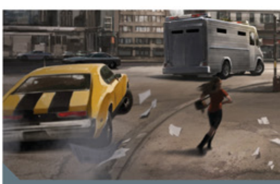


For the first time in the series, ***Driver*** **will feature licensed cars. Audi, McLaren and Ford are among the manufacturers to put their wares in the line of fire**

Shift also opens up tactical possibilities. Instead of clinging on to a target's coattails, clever players can warp ahead and wait in ambush. Edmondson demonstrates one such possibility by commandeering an articulated lorry and jackknifing it in the middle of the road.

Trail Blazer, one of nine multiplayer modes planned to be included in the final package, proves to be the perfect playground for us to explore the myriad possibilities of the Shifting mechanic. The objective is straightforward enough: remain in the slipstream of an NPC car for a set amount of time as it veers wildly across the streets. Unlike in the core campaign mode, where Shift has to be earned by performing stunts, slides and feats of overtaking, here Shift is infinite, creating a manic atmosphere as the players compete among themselves to take control of the best-positioned car on the field as the racing landscape continuously changes. While during our demo many choose to always warp to the car closest to the pacesetter, others take a more deliberating approach, scouring the map for the perfect car. Some opt for power, so as to jostle the opposition away from the slipstream; others are content to go for pace, satisfied that they can at least keep up with the action and let the others fight it out.

Reflections now faces the tricky challenge of not only communicating the idea of Shift to players already embittered by the series' slide in quality, but also in making sure that the slant on the genre lives up to its full potential. If it doesn't hit that perfect biting point between strategy and racing thrills, the public may yet decide it better to just get out and walk the rest of the way.



The big(gish) city

San Francisco was chosen as the game's setting because of the variety of its road network, as long, sprawling freeways merge with hilly crests and alleys. With 208 miles of road, Reflections boasts that its rendition of San Francisco is bigger than either Liberty City or Paradise City – two open worlds that certainly weren't found wanting in scope. It isn't a perfect recreation of the city, however. SF has been compressed for the benefit of the game structure, with the most notable changes occurring in the freeway networks, which have been dramatically trimmed.



The plot takes place just a few months after the events of ***Driver 3*****, as Tanner's long-time nemesis Jericho breaks out of a high-security police van in transit**









There's an entirely new game at the casino: 'caravan', based on trekking the wilds of *Fallout*'s blasted world. Quite how Obsidian will portray that with a deck of cards is yet to be seen, but something in the mould of XBLA's *Lost Cities* surely isn't out of the question

Fallout: New Vegas

Taking us back to the city of sin in Fallout's ruined America, Obsidian's game is a sure bet

FORMAT: **360, PC, PS3**
PUBLISHER: **BETHESDA**
DEVELOPER: **OBSIDIAN**
ORIGIN: **US**
RELEASE: **NOVEMBER 16**

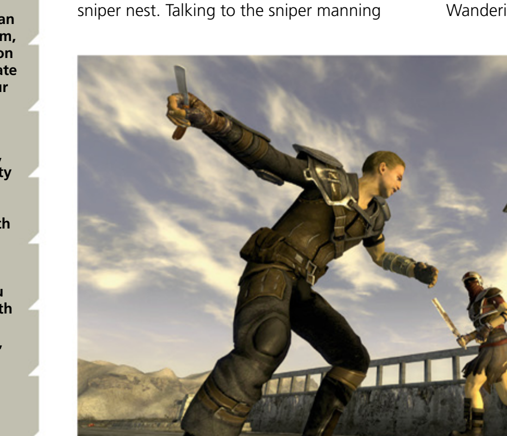
Out west, the air is clearer. The titular *New Vegas* of this return to the cracked, post-nuclear America of the *Fallout* series is a much airier affair than the Capital Wasteland of its direct predecessor. Gazing across the Mojave desert – as unaffected by nuclear blasts as you'd expect an expanse of sand and rock to be – the biggest shock is the blue sky. But that's not the only tonal shift. Where *Fallout 3* took the series' trademark bleakness, *New Vegas* appropriates touches of its humour, combining forlorn vistas with Kafka-esque absurdities. The settlement of Novac is a standout: an old, crumbling motel, it's home to a handful of residents, and a dinosaur.

Dinky the Dinosaur, to be exact: a cartoon tyrannosaur with a giant thermometer in his chest. In his belly, a gift shop; in his mouth, a sniper nest. Talking to the sniper manning the spot, he reveals he was betrayed by another, his wife sold into slavery. After exploiting the game's new conversational options – where skills such as sneaking translate into tangible dialogue choices – a touch of light-fingered stealing reveals the culprit. Luring them outside, we are treated to the unique spectacle of a human head being exploded by a rifle bullet against the backdrop of a green plastic dinosaur.

It's not all black humour; *New Vegas* easily fills its quota of straight hopelessness. Out in the desert, two camps face off against each other, a pair of New Vegas' confirmed factions – Caesar's Legion and the New California Rangers – locked in a death grip. The Legion has the upper hand, the Roman-influenced slavers having smashed the NCR back to a single point, Camp Forlorn Hope. Wandering the camp, beset by griping soldiers low on supplies, is a bleak exercise. Should you choose to, though, you can flip the predicament. Small fetch quests set the scene for an NCR counter-strike, collecting and collating useful items from around the desert. With a high enough medical skill, you can try your hand at patching up broken soldiers, slicing off gangrenous limbs with your character's implied surgical knowhow.

With the camp faring a little better after your influence, it's to battle with a band of NCR fighters. Taking the fight to Caesar's Legion, the player can dictate the plan of attack, choosing a position to strike from. *Fallout 3*'s VATS targeting system returns, cinematic decapitations made easier with the time-pausing mode. Freshly added are a raft of new guns, sidearms given a personality that the previous game's litany of identical SMGs and rifles lacked. Melee weapons, too, have been rejigged – each has their own special attack like the golf club's 'Fore!' move, an instant knockdown strike.

New Vegas is still no party town, but its lights are certainly brighter than *Fallout 3*'s ruined DC. Swollen with well-realised content, this latest *Fallout* could be as sparkling as the strip.



New weapons are in abundance. We've seen cutthroat razors and clawed gloves, indicating an enhanced game for the melee player



Companions cubed

Taking on a companion was advanced babysitting in *Fallout 3*, managing professional idiots with zero regard for their own mortality. Happily, Obsidian has addressed this problem, giving players a companion wheel with which to dictate their ally's actions. Armour and weapons are easily traded, your chum auto-equipping the best set in their inventory. Gone too, hopefully, is the propensity to launch into man-on-eight-foot-beast combat: select the ranged approach and your companion will sit back, taking potshots in a support role on the battlefield. Of course, you could just fly solo, but with the game's new hardcore mode introducing hunger, realistic inventory weight and slow-acting health-packs, having a friend in the wilds is going to be a useful thing.

FORMAT: **360, PS3**
PUBLISHER: **KONAMI**
DEVELOPER: **MERCURY STEAM**
ORIGIN: **SPAIN**
RELEASE: **AUTUMN**

Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow

Hideo Kojima's pet vampire project braves sunny Los Angeles to make its playable debut

As competitions go, it's unheralded to see two well-known Japanese game developers face off against each other in the same franchise at one E3. Koji Igarashi has produced an astonishingly left-of-centre take on his beloved series with the 2D XBLA title *Harmony Of Despair*, while *Lords Of Shadow*, a fully 3D 'reboot' of the series, features Hideo Kojima as executive producer.

But Kojima claims only a small role (the game is developed directly by Mercury Steam, not Kojima Productions), simply providing 'guidance' to the team. There certainly appears to be an absence of his trademark style of setting and story throughout the game's E3 demo.

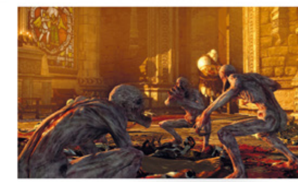
While it features high-quality, big-name voice work (Patrick Stewart lends his best Shakespearean tones, for example), *Lords Of Shadow* feels quite predictable from the off. With a powerful chain whip to hand, Gabriel Belmont apes Kratos a little too closely, unloading light attacks, heavy attacks, combos and juggles against swarming enemies. When larger foes turn up, requiring carefully timed QTE-style sequences to bring about their defeat, the similarities only become more pronounced.

The range of play on offer – from platforming to fighting titanic enemies – may offer enough diversity to make *Lords Of Shadow* agreeable on its own terms, but there's a risk that it might end up feeling like a trek through some of gaming's most beloved hits, from *God Of War* to *Shadow Of The Colossus*. On the upside, it's action that is rendered in terrific style, with appropriately ornate environments and atmospheric effects such as lashing rain.

While always a controversial steward for the series, Koji Igarashi seems to have learned the lesson from Wii fighting title *Castlevania Judgment* that *Castlevania* games must stay true to the series' core values to succeed, but there's a danger that Kojima has not hammered home such a message to Mercury Steam.


Robert Carlyle voices Gabriel Belmont, displaying more of his Hamish Macbeth side than his fearsome Begbie


The game's status as a reboot frees it from established series canon. When first announced, the game didn't even have the *Castlevania* name attached to it



Enslaved: Odyssey To The West

Did the Ming Dynasty scribes ever foresee the legend being controlled via a joypad?

FORMAT: **360, PS3**
PUBLISHER: **NAMCO BANDAI**
DEVELOPER: **NINJA THEORY**
ORIGIN: **UK**
RELEASE: **OCTOBER**

Beloved across the world, the story that began in the Chinese classical novel Journey To The West has seen hundreds of different interpretations, from the original Dragon Ball manga to Damon Albarn and Jamie Hewlett's recent stage musical. Yet for commentators such as us – raised on the late-'70s NHK version dubbed into English by the BBC and known as Monkey – Journey To The West feels particularly unusual as the backbone of an adventure set in a post-apocalyptic world featuring a gruff, muscle-bound protagonist resembling more of a gorilla than a monkey. Ultimately, though, *Enslaved* won't be taken to task the way *Dante's Inferno* was for its distinctive take on a classical work. It doesn't feature demonic babies, for starters.

Enslaved's world, rather than the dusty brown of the recent post-apocalypses, offers a lush planet where nature has begun to reclaim the cities even as mysterious robot armies patrol them. And while Monkey himself is a far cry from the mischievous fellow known to TV viewers of a certain age, his ward Trip hits that sweet spot of vulnerable and strong-willed, created not to fit into the pan-racial 'attractive-to-everyone' design that developers desperately cling on to in a bid to evoke emotional responses.

In play, however, *Enslaved* doesn't stand apart so comfortably. Monkey controls well, but in a problem that similarly faces *Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow* he brawls like Kratos and climbs like Nathan Drake. It's clear that his relationship with Trip will form the backbone not only of the story but the gameplay, and while they weren't especially apparent in the E3 demo, the points when the characters rely on one another to distract enemies turn out to be the most engrossing.

Enslaved might not offer every trick under the sun, but it's rendered with the flair and attention to detail with which Ninja Theory has made its name, and it feels solid enough. With a little more monkey magic, there may yet be fireworks.

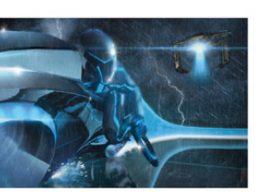

Monkey's computer-literate companion Trip controls the big lump through the headband he's wearing, which she claims will crush his skull if he doesn't follow her orders. Collaborative action is therefore a vital component


The ubiquitous Andy Serkis directs and provides motion capture for Monkey, while Alex Garland of Sunshine fame is on scriptwriting duties

FORMAT: **360, PC, PS3, WII**
PUBLISHER: **DISNEY INTERACTIVE**
DEVELOPER: **PROPAGANDA GAMES**
ORIGIN: **CANADA**
RELEASE: **NOVEMBER 1**

Tron: Evolution

Are Tron's combat and racing natural fodder for games?



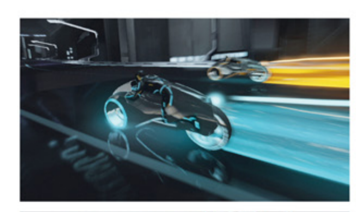
Propaganda Games claims that *Tron: Evolution* has one of the closest relationships with its movie sibling ever seen in gaming. And with a story that has the game provide backstory for the film and the film give context for the events of the game, that's not easy to query.



One of the biggest departures from established Tron tradition is the light-bikes' ability to turn gradually, not only at 90-degree angles – although switching direction sharply, and at high speed, remains an option

The question is over what, exactly, the film brings to the game. Sure, there's the original 1982 film's iconic light-disc combat and the light-bike racing, which were inspired by videogames in the first place, but they look curiously sterile by today's standards.

Evolution's approach presents light-disc combat in the form of a thirdperson platformer-cum-brawler in the vein of *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time*. Smartly, the trigger buttons act as modifiers to your movements and attacks. Hold the left one and your stance changes to guard while also making your attacks more powerful, while the right makes you sprint, able to vault, wall-run and perform quick strikes. Quite how nuanced the system really is requires more time – we managed to get through with a degree of mashing and mad dashing – and as a whole the combat would benefit from being a lot more fluid. Tron's trademark neon-edged environments don't help matters, their starkness making it harder for the game to signpost the way ahead through the level.







Propaganda says that although the parkour sections, which string together areas focused on combat, look linear, prescribing a set of actions, they can actually be tackled in multiple ways if you're skilled enough

Propaganda Games has clearly struggled to inject as much depth into the light-bike sections, as they struggle to communicate a sense of speed and drama as you try to dodge the trails of competitors and obstacles along the course. But then with a licence like Tron, for all its surface logic, the whole proposition is a barbed one.

Metal Gear Solid: Rising

Konami shows off the first slices of lightning bolt action

FORMAT: **360, PS3**
PUBLISHER: **KONAMI**
DEVELOPER: **KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS**
ORIGIN: **JAPAN**
RELEASE: **TBA**

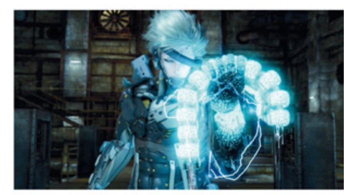
Metal Gear Solid: Rising is what happens when a series perpetually confined to hiding in shadows, behind corners, and beneath cardboard boxes finally gets a chance to cut loose. Shown off at Microsoft's E3 press conference with a trailer that showcased the violent precision of cybernetically enhanced *MGS2* protagonist Raiden, *MGS: Rising* looks to be a faster paced and predatory take on the series' stealth gameplay.

Though the game's being sold on its cutting mechanic, Kojima Productions has previous of teasing out a tool's every possible use – as well as making fruity jokes with it



Rising's producer, Shigenobu Matsuyama, has described the game's central mechanic as 'zan-datsu', or 'cut and take' – demonstrated by a cutscene in which Raiden leaps out from hiding, dismembers a hulking cyborg then tears a glowing spine from its insides and drains its power. How much this will affect gameplay is unclear from a trailer more interested in the cutting process.

The showpiece mechanic is Raiden's ability to slow down time before dicing opponents to pieces in a leisurely manner with an aim mode that allows players to select the precise angle of a katana slash. Human opponents can be sliced up as easily as anyone who's seen *MGS4*'s cutscenes would expect, though the trailer also showed Raiden chopping pillars, whole vehicles and a melon to pieces. Rather than merely a series in-joke, it was the melon that best showed the precision offered by the aim mode, as Raiden reduced it to a neat line of fruit salad.



A far cry from the unspoiled blonde of *MGS2*, *Rising* allegedly explains Raiden's cybernetic form in *MGS4*. We'd wager it doesn't just come down to a drunken bet

No indication was given as to where *Rising* is set, or if it will borrow *MGS4*'s multi-act structure, but the locations shown in the trailer suggest an urban environment distinct from those in the previous game. Raiden was shown cutting a swathe through waves of human opponents (and the awnings sheltering them) with relative ease. Presumably, cyborg foes will pose a greater threat and require different tactics.

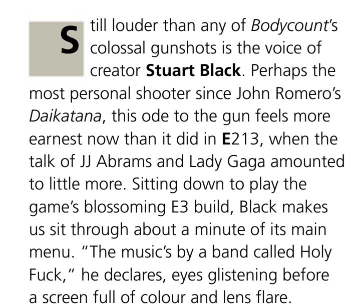
Despite the trailer's action slant, Kojima Productions is keen to stress that stealth will still be in there, albeit as part of a design geared more towards hunting prey than hiding from enemies. Rather than skulking in air vents and lurking in the undergrowth, Raiden's acrobatic abilities mean hiding and attacking from on high – a fitting contrast for a game that's giving a long-running series a shot in the arm.


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FORMAT: **360, PS3**
PUBLISHER: **CODEMASTERS**
DEVELOPER: **CODEMASTERS GUILDFORD**
ORIGIN: **UK**
RELEASE: **TBA**
PREVIOUSLY IN: **E213**

Bodycount

Codemasters' shooter is getting personal



A mini-map proves vital, enemy markers featuring a cone to show their field of vision. Black suggests that its time on screen may be limited to spice things up

Still louder than any of *Bodycount*'s colossal gunshots is the voice of creator **Stuart Black**. Perhaps the most personal shooter since John Romero's *Daikatana*, this ode to the gun feels more earnest now than it did in **E**213, when the talk of JJ Abrams and Lady Gaga amounted to little more. Sitting down to play the game's blossoming E3 build, Black makes us sit through about a minute of its main menu. "The music's by a band called Holy Fuck," he declares, eyes glistening before a screen full of colour and lens flare.

A mere test bed just a few months ago, this Africa stage has grown around its initial cluster of buildings and watchtowers. Now it spans rooftops, storm drains, interiors and yards. There are primary and secondary objectives, fortified front doors and disguised shortcuts. The whens and wheres are left up to you. The stunt deaths are just now going in, says Black, enemies firing into the air as they stumble to their deaths, or somersaulting out of exploding guard posts.

Two other voices in the E3 demo are those of Jackson, the hero, and his operator Melanie. If Carlsberg made call centres, theirs is the banter you'd expect. "John, I need you to be aware that your life expectancy has dropped dramatically," she says. Later, as the dust clears: "I don't usually kiss on a first date, John, but that was fun. Thanks for participating in today's engagement." Why is he 'John' all of a sudden? What are those incongruous noises in the background – a distant nightclub, a hotel room, bustling traffic? We've been asked not to say.

That you can shred entirely through some but not all of the game's walls is actually the least surprising thing. Musical cascades, for example, signal the collection of intel points, which burst from enemy heads in place of gore. And there's more than a shade of *Resident Evil 4* about the Pirate Psycho, the game's current cover star, who sends you scurrying into a corner before chewing out the wall behind you with gunfire.

Still the most important FPS of the generation? It's in with a shot.





The backdrop to the Africa stage, a monolithic structure dubbed 'the PlayStation' by journalists for its resemblance to a PS2, has been replaced by something closer to the hammers in Pink Floyd's The Wall. That 'stealth by Apple' design philosophy is alive and well

FORMAT: **360, PC, PS3**
PUBLISHER: **2K GAMES**
DEVELOPER: **YAGER DEVELOPMENT**
ORIGIN: **GERMANY**
RELEASE: **2011**

Spec Ops: The Line

Shooting into the heart of darkest Dubai on the trail of a familiar-sounding bad guy

Few would celebrate the revival of a series that most will have forgotten. But this new addition to a string of creaky squad-based tactical shooters that was mothballed in 2002 neatly sidesteps its past in favour of pursuing the strongly story-led model of shooters that 2K has carefully been nurturing since *BioShock*.

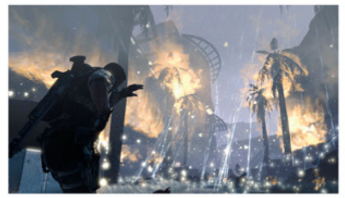


The shooting, in military squad shooter fashion, is fast and accurate. The squad is autonomous and doesn't need orders

Story-led? Make that literary-led. Though its producers don't mention *The Line*'s inspirations, they're naked. Protagonist Captain Martin Walker (voiced by Nolan North) has been sent to a near-future Dubai with a Delta Force squad to search for a lost colonel. The city has been beset by sandstorms so severe that it has been left empty but for looters and the military, who are searching its sand-filled plazas and skyscrapers for valuables. But when Walker arrives, he realises that the situation is rather more complex – someone is sponsoring barbaric acts among those remaining in the city. And it looks likely that person is the very colonel you're after. His name? John Konrad.

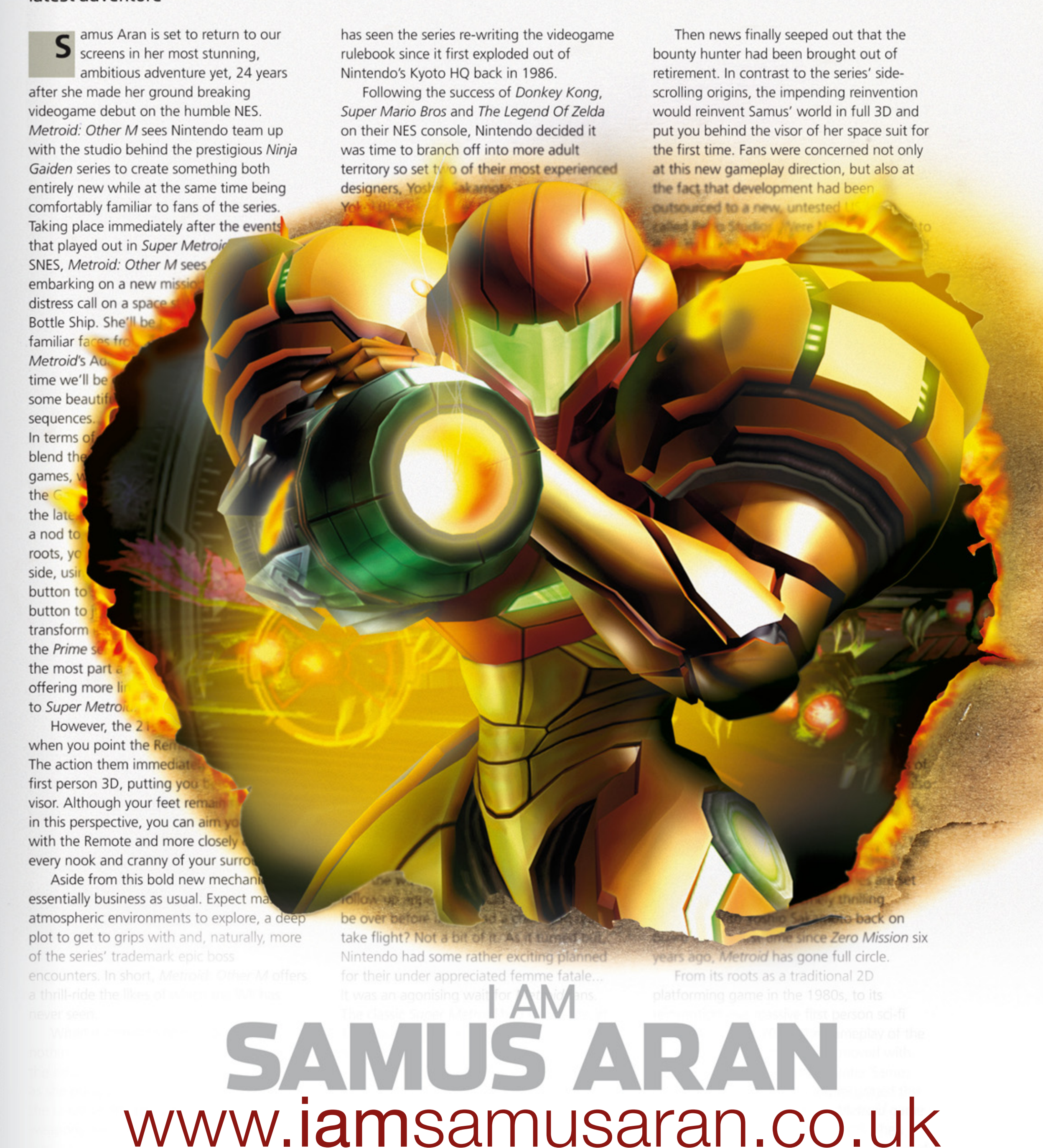
Heart Of Darkness in the desert is a good theme for a thirdperson shooter, especially one that aims to 'challenge your moral preconceptions'. Key to realising this is a series of set-pieces in which you're given the freedom to choose their outcome. We see soldiers take two civilians and begin to torture them for some information they – and you – need. With the situation becoming more tense by the moment, your squadmates try to press for the attack. Your choice is between storming in, risking the deaths of the prisoners, or waiting and listening in for that information.

If the finished game can account for every eventuality, sustain a meaningful level of choice and have these sequences sit naturally in the flow of play, *The Line* has a good chance of elevating itself within a well-worn genre.





The city-in-a-sandstorm setting means that you'll frequently encounter avalanches of sand which have built up behind the city's walls – handily, you can use them as an offensive weapon, potentially burying bad guys alive


Metroid Other M
Lifting the lid on Samus Aran's latest adventure
Samus Aran is set to return to our screens in her most stunning, ambitious adventure yet, 24 years after she made her ground breaking videogame debut on the humble NES. Metroid: Other M sees Nintendo team up with the studio behind the prestigious Ninja Gaiden series to create something both entirely new while at the same time being comfortably familiar to fans of the series. Taking place immediately after the events that played out in Super Metroid
SNES, Metroid: Other M sees
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visor. Although your feet remain
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Aside from this bold new mechani
essentially business as usual. Expect ma
atmospheric environments to explore, a deep
plot to get to grips with and, naturally, more
of the series' trademark epic boss
encounters.
has seen the series re-writing the videogame rulebook since it first exploded out of Nintendo's Kyoto HQ back in 1986.
Following the success of Donkey Kong, Super Mario Bros and The Legend Of Zelda on their NES console, Nintendo decided it was time to branch off into more adult territory so set two of their most experienced designers,
be over before
take flight? Not a bit of it. As it turned out, Nintendo had some rather exciting planned for their under appreciated femme fatale...
Then news finally seeped out that the bounty hunter had been brought out of retirement. In contrast to the series' side-scrolling origins, the impending reinvention would reinvent Samus' world in full 3D and put you behind the visor of her space suit for the first time. Fans were concerned not only at this new gameplay direction, but also at the fact that development had been outsourced to a new, untested
since Zero Mission six years ago, Metroid has gone full circle.
From its roots as a traditional 2D platforming game in the 1980s, to its
I AM
SAMUS ARAN
www.iamsamusaran.co.uk

FORMAT: **360, PC, PS3**
PUBLISHER: **SQUARE ENIX**
DEVELOPER: **EIDOS MONTREAL**
ORIGIN: **CANADA**
RELEASE: **MARCH**



Deus Ex: Human Revolution

It finally has the looks and the poise, but does it have the choices to surpass its classic forebear?

Deus Ex has never looked so stylish. Cutaways of anime leaps and blade-enabled assassinations emphasise protagonist Adam Jensen's deadly cool. And its world has never been so beautiful – take our glimpse of a vast metropolis on an island off the Shanghai coast so densely populated that it consists of a ground level with another layer of city suspended above it.

Jensen is bound for the shadowed and smoggy lower layer to find a lead on a hacker in a nightclub called The Hive. The alleys are choked with pedestrians, buildings thick with adverts – quite how open they are to exploration isn't yet clear, but they're evocative. The original's legendary focus on player choice is present, though we can't tell if the demo's apparently simplistic nature is down to its need for brevity. A well-voiced branching conversation with a recalcitrant barman goes sour, leading to listening in on staff discussing a guard's loss of his keycard – and isn't that it, conveniently lying in the corner of the room?

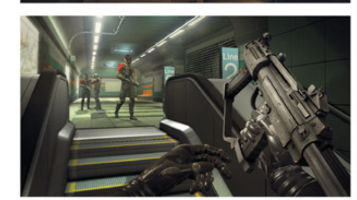
Augmentations are shown off in a second scenario, in which Jensen must plant a bomb in a dockside office. A strength augmentation allows him to lift a crate to gain access and avoid CCTV cameras, a stealth augmentation briefly makes him invisible to guards, while another allows him to see enemies through walls. Hacking a computer gains access, as in the first *Deus Ex*, to controls for turrets and CCTV. Gunplay itself is supported by a cover system, though Eidos Montreal underlines the fact that it's possible to play through the game without killing anyone bar the bosses.

In short, all the core ingredients that made its forebear an enduring classic are here – the question is how they're blended together. But Eidos would do well to note that the original's success certainly wasn't down to style.

The action is viewed from firstperson but currently snaps rather confusingly into thirdperson when Jensen's in cover (above) or performing a close assassination, moves that resemble *Assassin's Creed*'s







As with the previous games, your weapons can be upgraded, with the rocket launcher able to target heat sources so you can lock on and shoot from cover



FORMAT: **360, PC, PS3**
PUBLISHER: **2K GAMES**
DEVELOPER: **2K MARIN**
ORIGIN: **US**
RELEASE: **TBA**

XCOM

A strategy classic goes firstperson in Norman Rockwell's 1950s

"Strategic." "It's your choice." We hear these words multiple times during our demo of this firstperson follow-up to a celebrated turn-based strategy game. 2K Marin is anxious to stress the respectful relationship *XCOM* will have with the series that precedes it – well, the first two games, anyway.

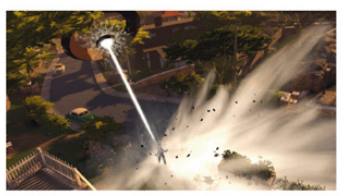
Back then it was your task to lead an organisation against a mysterious alien force, freely assigning resources to the muscle and the brains you needed to fight them. And now, well, you're still the leader of that organisation. As in the originals, you'll find alien artefacts, take them back to your lab and research them to build better weapons. The difference is that before you'd use radar to track alien craft and send fighters to bring them down, while now you listen in on emergency calls for evidence of activity.

We see a callout to a queerly deserted suburban street, accompanied by two AI agents and prefaced by a visit to the armoury (shotgun, lightning gun, 'blobotov' grenades). Exploration reveals houses closely detailed to the wonderfully stylised '50s setting before the cause of the silence breaks it. A man rushes out of a door, vomiting black slime before dying. Black 'blobs' – balls of slime and blue energy – appear and attack, and it's suddenly action time. The battle sees an agent killed, choked with goo before being engulfed in flame by a grenade: the best way to kill the blobs is with fire.

What's clear is that this encounter is largely scripted, and the map on which it plays out is clearly hand-designed. We wonder to what extent strategic choice is really driving the game, given that its levels can't necessarily adhere to the originals' open-ended and randomly generated ones. Then again, with a closing set-piece which sees the player burned alive by a weapon that bleaches all the colour from the scene, perhaps that's not quite such a bad thing.



Geometric and energy-based alien life forms, such as this Elerium-bearing one (above), are thematically interesting but, displaying too little feedback on being hit under gunfire, they don't appear particularly rewarding to fight. They can pack a punch, though



Research requires you to find alien artefacts and take photos, but your boffins want Elerium to make super weaponry and armour, which you'll need to capture

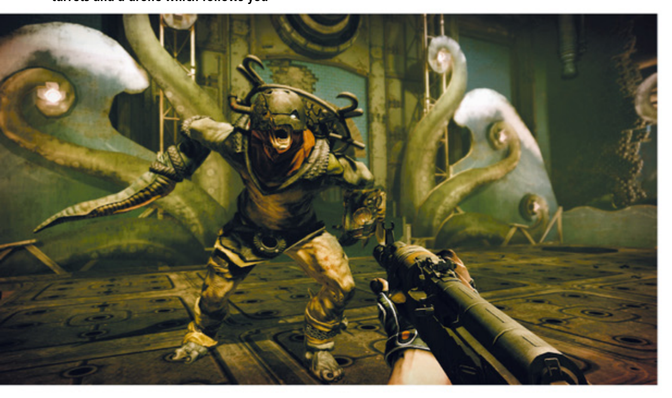
FORMAT: **360, PC, PS3**
PUBLISHER: **BETHESDA SOFTWORKS**
DEVELOPER: **ID SOFTWARE**
ORIGIN: **US**
RELEASE: **2011**
PREVIOUSLY IN: **E205**

Rage

Cockney bandits and grenade-launcher-toting mutants – all in the interests of good shootin'


You can build tools using resources you find dotted around the world, such as turrets and a drone which follows you

We saw much of this E3 demo when we covered the game's reveal in **E**205, including the introduction of the game's first hub town, Wellspring, the importance of driving, and the mutant threat to this pulp future dystopia. This time, though, we're seeing it all on a 360. And, at 60fps ("We think it's fundamental to the shooter experience," says lead designer **Matt Hooper**), it looks fantastic.

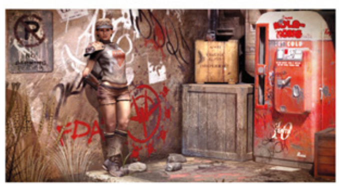


More novel, though, is the appearance of two new missions. The first is to take on a gang of bandits threatening to poison Wellspring's water supply. A new ammo type for the crossbow is revealed, the electrobolt, and it's quickly clear what's it's good for. Three bandits congregated in a pool of water are immediately shocked to death with a single, silent bolt. These bandits hardly take the assault lying down, though. Each gang is themed – this one is acrobatic, wall-jumping and leaping in to attack. Id has clearly continued to develop already exemplary visual feedback, with shots making enemies clutch their shoulders, or tossing a leg out before they bolt forward. The action is brutal, finely tuned and exhilarating.

A second level concerns the assault of a dam facility that's occupied by British bandits shouting in cockney accents. They use cover well, but burning them out sees an end to that. Another sport is to shoot from one angle before sneaking around to rake them with fire from the flank. Finally, a visit to






You'll see NPCs playing minigames that you can join in with – we see a simple one in which you must defeat mutants advancing along a four-way axis

Dead City, a landscape of crooked, broken skyscrapers, sees a running street battle against quick-moving small mutants, then a large grenade-launcher-wielding one, and then a vast one before that E3 favourite, the cliffhanger fadeout.

Id's clear mastery of the FPS genre makes *Rage* easily stand out from the many others on the E3 show floor. Since it already looks as polished and finished as this, we're struggling to imagine what else it'll bring when it's released next year.

Brink

A little teamwork with the ex-modders from Croydon

FORMAT: **360, PC, PS3**
PUBLISHER: **BETHESDA SOFTWORKS**
DEVELOPER: **SPLASH DAMAGE**
ORIGIN: **UK**
RELEASE: **2011**
PREVIOUSLY IN: **E204**

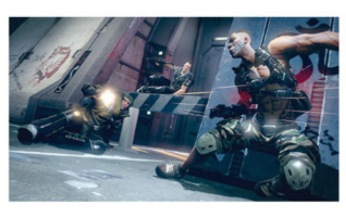
We're going to come out and say that *Brink*'s E3 demo isn't a good one. If you know *Brink* as that beautiful-looking game with the blue skies, a bright sun and those white, towering buildings, the dingy semi-industrial setting of the demo we played could only come as a disappointment.

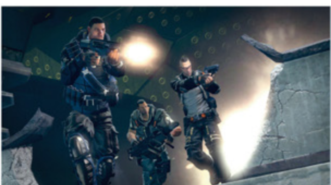
So too is the demo's introduction to this complex firstperson team-objective multiplayer shooter. Having chosen your class from a selection similar to those in Splash Damage's first fully commercial release, *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars*, you hit the up button on the D-pad to discover what objectives are available to you to progress your side's fortunes and earn you a dose of XP. Select one and an arrow appears at the top of the screen to point you towards your goal – which could, for example, be a hacking point if you're an Operative.


XP unlocks skills for each class, such as one for the Operative which throws the camera out to thirdperson while you're hacking

That arrow is a little too clever for its own good. It doesn't point directly at your target, which might encourage use of the SMART system, which smoothly allows you to traverse the levels, horizontally and vertically. Rather, it pathfinds you a route, confusing you about the actual location even when you're actually standing right under it.

The problem with the objective screen, meanwhile, is that it's rather dispassionate for a game with as fully developed a backstory as *Brink*'s. Where's the dramatic framing? The establishment of the enemy as a force to be crushed? What's everyone else doing? To develop the latter point, it diverts the flowing and rewarding serendipity that




SMART works well, employing just one button to perform complex manoeuvres, always keeping you in control. It lacks *Mirror's Edge*'s sense of physicality, though

Brink can potentially bring into something more self-seeking. After all, since you also get rewarded if you help teammates achieve their objectives, *Brink* should inherently be providing dynamic, deeply social play.

On the bright side, all the issues are down to the demo's presentation rather than fundamental problems with *Brink*'s building blocks. And with extra time on the clock to get the game finished, there's every chance that these can be brushed up.



Jump in.

XBOX 360.



Get ready for the biggest adventure on DS

Dragon Quest IX

Sentinels of the Starry Skies



Life watching over humans as a guardian high up in the heavens should be plain sailing. But after a mysterious force strikes the majestic Observatory, your hero finds himself stranded in the world of mortals, without wings and full of questions.

This is where you come in. Enjoy creating and customising your hero and his companions, before embarking on an adventure that will take you to every corner of a massive world. Fight unforgettable monsters, take on countless quests, and hop into other players' worlds thanks to Dragon Quest IX's seamless multiplayer mode. Here's what awaits.



For more information...

Dragon Quest IX: Sentinels Of The Starry Skies is released on 23 July. Until then, check out www.begindragonquest.co.uk for loads more info on its world, characters and customisation options!

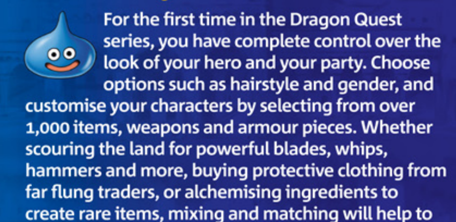
www.dragonquest9.co.uk







Create your own hero



For the first time in the Dragon Quest series, you have complete control over the look of your hero and your party. Choose options such as hairstyle and gender, and customise your characters by selecting from over 1,000 items, weapons and armour pieces. Whether scouring the land for powerful blades, whips, hammers and more, buying protective clothing from far flung traders, or alchemising ingredients to create rare items, mixing and matching will help to create a party of adventurers perfectly balanced to deal with the many challenges that lie ahead.



Explore far horizons

Finding yourself in the village of Angel Falls, the village you protected as a guardian, you must kick on and explore the world in order to return to your celestial home. Next stop, the bustling citadel of Stornway, where you'll find the first of many traders, side-quests and quirky characters. Every town you discover has its own distinct flavour and drama, which you'll be called upon to solve – though the rewards make it all worthwhile. You never know what lies over the horizon, but one thing is for sure. Your quest will only become richer for finding out.



Battle manic monsters

On your journey you'll encounter well over 180 of the funniest and most challenging monsters, from psychotic cucumbers to giant dragons. Set battle tactics for your party and use the special abilities and powerful spells you learn to get the better of them. As you defeat each beast, you are rewarded with experience points which enable you to level up and become more powerful. As your defence and attack levels are raised, you learn incredible new techniques, giving you the confidence to venture into new areas populated with treacherous new threats.



Share your quest

Using the DS's local wireless network, you'll be able to connect with fellow players and team up on your adventures. It's easy: make sure you're within range, then you'll be invited to step into another player's world – or vice versa. Then you can continue your journey together, teaming up to overcome even more powerful enemies and sharing the huge rewards on offer. Plus, a unique Canvass Mode allows you to swap vital information with fellow players, such as treasure maps. All you have to do is leave Dragon Quest IX in standby mode!



SQUARE ENIX. NINTENDO DS.







HEAVY LIES THE CROWN

FABLE III'S BROKEN PROMISES HOPE TO DEMONSTRATE THAT ULTIMATE POWER CAN BE A RIGHT ROYAL PAIN

Lionhead's exuberant founder **Peter Molyneux** knows something about making big promises. And now, with *Fable III*, he has made a game all about how difficult they are to keep. The third instalment in the genre-blending fantasy adventure is a game of two halves – as the first part unfolds, you find yourself begging support for your bid on the throne of Albion. And then later, you discover that those who've helped you take the crown expect you to return the favour.

The problems that then arise are an evolution of the series' hallmark moral choices. It's a thread that runs throughout Lionhead's catalogue – games as polarising personality tests – no better epitomised than by god sim *Black & White*, in which you cultivated a creature to angelic or demonic extremes. Similarly, every decision in *Fable* and its first sequel sent the moral compass swinging between opposites – the cumulative results reflected in your avatar's appearance. Choice and consequence take on big roles in the developer's third outing to Albion, but Lionhead is keen that morality is no longer a trivial decision between horns or halos. With your hero as king, your decisions are dramatically reshaped in the light of regal responsibility and complicated by realpolitik: doing as you might wish just isn't always practical.

"I think it should be so much more sophisticated than 'Do I want to be a psychotic killer or do I want to be Mother Teresa?' That's what most moral choices come down to," says Molyneux. "I want to know what you're going to do with power. I think there is an analogy with today's world, and someone like Obama. He had the coolest presidential campaign ever. Literally, you had the world stopping and cheering when he was elected. And here we are over a year later and it's now cool in America to bash Obama. A lot of leaders seem to age and whither within a few weeks – personally I'm looking forward to seeing David Cameron age a little bit, but there you go. Part of that experience is in *Fable*. When you become ruler, promises turn out be a lot more difficult to follow through on – like closing Guantanamo Bay."

And what would be a *Fable III* equivalent of Guantanamo Bay?

"Throughout the game you see these poor kids working in these factories," says **Josh Atkins**, *Fable III*'s lead game designer. "Along the way you get an ally who says to you: 'I really want you to make Bowerstone [one of Albion's main cities] a better place, get the kids out of the factories and workhouses and into schools'. But you come to a point where you have to decide against a counterbalance of limited time and money."

Molyneux elaborates: "What a lovely promise that is! But what you then realise is that without the workhouses, industry is going to be annihilated. People will live and die on these choices – they radically change the whole of Albion – and sometimes these choices are very, very tough."

"You can try and keep all your promises," says Atkins, "and you are certainly able to if you play a certain way – but it's going to be challenging."

These new kingly conundrums serve as the backdrop to a swashbuckling adventure that should be be more familiar in its action to fans of the series. Although magic has receded from Albion as it presses on through an industrial revolution, it is still very recognisably the world of *Fable* – parodying that imaginary England of bucolic fantasy, by turns farcical and dark.

"Sixty years have moved on in the *Fable* world," says Molyneux. "Your hero – who you can import from *Fable II* – saved Albion from The Spire. *Fable II*'s story ended with Teresa saying: 'Thanks a lot, now get out: The Spire's mine.' You were crowned ruler of Albion. Then you died."

In *Fable III* you play as one of that ruler's children, seemingly disinherited in favour of your brother Logan, who then takes the throne. For the sake of brevity, Molyneux refers to the player as a man – but you can choose your gender just as in previous games.

"So you're a prince and you live in the castle, but you don't really have any responsibilities. Meanwhile, Logan is becoming more and more tyrannical. There are protesters outside the castle – he just shoots them. He seems to be doing every terrible thing to Albion he can – he seems to have gone mad. And then, after a series of unfortunate events, you are forced to escape from the castle with a band of supporters."

In fleeing the castle, your dormant heroic powers are ignited, and it becomes clear that you must use them to foment a rebellion.

"The next thing we say is: you need to get followers," says

"YOUR BROTHER IS BECOMING MORE AND MORE TYRANNICAL. THERE ARE PROTESTERS AT THE CASTLE – HE SHOOTS THEM. HE SEEMS TO BE DOING EVERY TERRIBLE THING HE CAN. HE SEEMS TO HAVE GONE MAD"

TITLE: **FABLE III**
FORMAT: **360, PC**
PUBLISHER: **MICROSOFT**
DEVELOPER: **LIONHEAD STUDIOS**
ORIGIN: **UK**
RELEASE: **AUTUMN**



Atkins: "Best friends will ask you to do little quests. It's dynamic – the game grabs creatures and a location, then draws you a breadcrumb trail"

Molyneux. "The more followers you have, the more powerful you are, the more abilities you unlock, the more you visibly change. Really, followers are just experience points, but we've tried to move *Fable* away from being a roleplaying game. There are some things I love about roleplaying games: progression, the feeling of getting more powerful, and feeling it's you in the game rather than some canned hero. I love levelling up, but hate that it's all about changing the number four to five to six. I think by playing a role you should feel like you're part of the drama."

The decision to move away from the more turgid traditions and abstract strictures of the RPG doesn't just come from Molyneux's antipathy. Lionhead has statistics detailing how people played the last game, and surveys which suggest that many of the previous game's fussier elements were ignored by the vast majority. "Some of the things people found confusing were very core to what you think *Fable*'s about," says Molyneux. "Things like spending experience points – you'd think everyone likes that, but actually not that many people really understood it. We asked: 'Did you think about how you were going to spend your experience?' And, well, the answer was: 'Not really'."

As such, levelling up is something now indicated in purely visual rather than numerical terms, and you increase skills by using them. Weapons grow more powerful the more you wield them and indicate something of your character: use a blade to shed innocent blood and it will eventually morph into a demonic barb which growls when you pull it from the scabbard; do good and unsheathing it will elicit an angelic chorus.

Atkins says NPCs' reactions in *Fable II* were often a little obtuse. "When it comes to interacting with the sim we have tried to clarify the system itself. There's a massive domino chain you have to think about"





in the catacombs, and his suspicions soon prove to be reasonable. Creepy things are afoot – dusty skeletons from long-vanquished visitors scatter the stairwells – and soon a malign presence assaults our heroes, issuing Shadow minions and billowing black oily ick from dark spacial ruptures.

"We use the combat to set a tone and a mood," says Atkins. "In *Fable II* we'd just pop some creatures in a room and let you whack them. This time we're more conscious of staging and pace. With Shadelight, we're trying to keep you wondering what's around the next corner."

is to magic. *Fable II* gave players the ability to stack spells so that different ones would be charged depending on how long you held the button down. It was a smart way of allowing players to equip a variety of spells on the same button, and a centrepiece of our personal battle tactics – but, to our dismay, Lionhead's consumer surveys suggest it was also beyond most people's comprehension. Now spells are tied to specific gauntlets – and while this limits your moment-to-moment flexibility, there is one major boon for magic-fancying players: spells can now be combined

CORONATION CHICKEN

Players of *Fable II* will recall the hassles of burrowing through the game's many lists and menus. *Fable III* introduces The Sanctuary, to which you instantly teleport by pressing Start.

"You can do pretty much anything there that you could do from a 2D menu, and there's no load time," says Molyneux.

As UI nerds, we're a little sceptical, but it does indeed take only a matter of seconds for us to dash into the clothing room and don a chicken suit. From The Sanctuary you can also observe your kingdom with a zoomable, moving 3D map. It conjures thoughts of Molyneux's previous god games, but although you can set the tax rate, Atkins tells us that *Fable III* stops short of being *Populous*.



Lionhead chief Peter Molyneux

"IN FABLE II WE'D JUST POP SOME CREATURES IN A ROOM AND LET YOU WHACK THEM. THIS TIME WE'RE MORE CONSCIOUS OF STAGING AND PACE"

As this weapon fetishism suggests, combat still remains central to the main story missions. We discover this for ourselves during a dangerous sojourn to Albion's neighbouring continent of Aurora. It's here that we hope to drum up further support to overthrow Logan, but our plans are set back when a sea battle sinks our ship – leaving us to wash up on Aurora's shoreline with only our dog and faithful mentor Walter for company.

Aurora itself gives Lionhead's artists a chance to stretch their legs beyond the pastel pastures and green glens of Albion – our first encounter with it suggests an antique arid empire with askew monuments and vast, shattered statues, half-sunk in boundless sands. Early reports that it was based on America have obviously been misleading.

"That might have been a slight misquote," says Molyneux. "What I meant was that America didn't exist to Europeans in the same way that Aurora hasn't existed to the people of Albion until now. Then they stumbled across a whole new continent." He adds mysteriously: "There *is* an Americanism about it – but it's not what you expect."

Whatever it is, it's not evident in the cove in which our hero finds himself. Hemmed in by towering red sandstone cliffs, the only way out appears to be through some caves, and from there into some sort of temple, referred to by the devs as Shadelight. Walter, played by Bernard Hill (King Théoden from The Lord Of The Rings films) – one of the many high-calibre names attached to the game – is nervous of what might wait

Invariably, the answer is bad stuff. Which is fine by us, because *Fable III* recaptures much of what made *Fable II*'s combat system feel so elegant and empowering. Once again, melee, guns and magic are assigned a button each with the option to hold one down and charge a more powerful attack in a chosen direction. And, as with experience points in *Fable II*, more followers are awarded if you keep up the variety between your assaults. This time, however, the game is more generous with its cinematic slow-motion kills, the camera swooping in to see you boot an enemy into the air before slashing it in half.

There are a smattering of minor alterations: there is now no cap on the amount you can charge an attack, Time Control is a potion rather than a spell, and the HUD is banished entirely along with your health bar. Now the screen turns red as you approach death, then recovers over time.

The most radical change, however,

simultaneously by wearing a different gauntlet on each hand. Combine Vortex and Inferno, and you can unleash a whirlwind of flame. Shock and Force Push will send enemies flying in a blast of sizzling electricity.

As we battle our way through the nightmarish underworld of Shadelight, however, we have no such recourse, having not yet gained enough followers to unlock the ability to mix spells. Nonetheless, we successfully repel the Shadow forces – although not before they have overwhelmed and blinded Walter. Holding the left trigger, we are able to take his hand and physically guide him out of Shadelight and into the baking sands of Aurora's surface.

There's no sign of life, but a distant statue which towers over the horizon suggests civilisation and we start out across the desert, Walter in tow. Lionhead is very proud of this touch mechanic, and while it seems at first



"To be honest with you, the dog's not changed radically, really, because, well, he was just a dog," says Molyneux. "What we found is that people didn't want spells for your dog or anything like that"

Molyneux: "You're very much the last of these heroes. The world of Albion is very industrial now. People are forgetting the world of magic. So if you cast magic, people get very impressed very easily"

like just another button to hold down, its potential to bring greater meaning becomes apparent when a flagging Walter begs you to leave him behind.

"If you choose to take Walter through the desert, he's going to get slower and slower and eventually you'll just be dragging him along," says Molyneux. "We're going to play with your boredom levels a bit. I don't want these decisions to be about which button you press immediately. If I said it's going to take 25 minutes to cross that bit of desert with Walter, that's a real choice you're making. It's not just A or B – I'm dealing with the most valuable commodity, which is your time and patience. I want you to think: 'Fuck it, I'll just leave him behind!' But bear in mind you've probably spent about six hours with him already; he's saved you a couple of times; he's been very loyal. If we do our job right, you'll feel some emotional connection and moral responsibility."

The 25 minutes is, thankfully, an exaggeration, Atkins later concedes – but having declared ourselves the goodie-two-shoes sort that would stoically drag Walter to safety without a second thought he says dryly: "I'll be interested to see how far you get."

Lionhead plays with this sort of attachment throughout the game – early on you are required to make a similar decision, but because you have no emotional connection to the characters at that stage, playtesters have generally opted for a more cold-hearted and practical approach. But both Atkins and Molyneux stress the importance of restraint – bombarding players with these sorts of dilemmas reduces their impact. To wit, the most difficult choices only arise in the main story thread.

"We don't tend to put too much flippant humour there," says **Louise Murray**, the head of the *Fable* franchise. "That's where all the darkness tends to come in. In *Fable II* you had The Spire and all the difficult questions about that, and in *Fable III* you've got Shadelight, which is us getting into some pretty dark territory – almost horror. But then we put that alongside the need to spend time with the people of the world, who are generally doing trivial things like chasing chickens."

We get a chance to chase chickens for ourselves, too. A visit to Albion's university town, Brightwall, lets us kick the tyres of *Fable III*'s ancillary social features. Like the combat, they follow a pattern familiar to *Fable* fans, but their options are now expanded. Of course, our problems with the institution of marriage in *Fable II* weren't to do with a lack of depth, but simply a lack of purpose. Without any reason to get married or do jobs or furnish houses, apart from curiosity, the activities quickly palled. The statistics show that we weren't alone.

"We holistically solved that problem," says Molyneux. "Now in *Fable III*, everything you do gives you followers. If you marry someone in high society you get more followers, if you buy a really nice house you get more followers, if you make people laugh in the street you get a few followers. We needed that one thread to give you a reason to do things. Every time you fight, get married, talk to someone, buy something, customise something, you are going to get these followers. That gives you more ability to do what you want."

We choose to spend our time in Brightwall seducing another man's wife so he has legitimate grounds for divorce. Then we help another local to retrieve his errant chickens, luring them back to the pen while wearing a

FEAR AND LOATHING

We put to Molyneux that acquiring more followers by marrying into high society isn't especially egalitarian.

"It's about people's opinions," he says. "It's a simulation, actually. If you marry somebody of society, you get more followers, but people will think less of you. If you marry someone from the streets, people might not respect you for it, but they'll like you more. You can mess around with this global group mind of what things mean to society."

"At the highest level there's fear, hate, friend and love/best-friend," says Atkins, describing the categories of regard the citizens of Albion can have for you. "Each stage of the relationship has different benefits and downsides. To be loved is harder than to be feared – which I think is probably true to life."





Lead designer Josh Atkins and *Fable* series head Louise Murray

Each weapon morphs over time to become unique to the wielder, part of its appearance being generated by both a player's behaviour and their Gamerscore






Your hero now has a voice. "We'd taken the silent protagonist route as far as it could go," says Atkins. "Dramatic scenes don't work if you can't talk"

If there was one thing that mattered to us in *Fable II*, it was that co-op didn't give us the chance to show off how awesome we looked when we joined another's game (for the record, it was extremely awesome: a punk-rock Gandalf, as played by Brian Blessed). With Lionhead addressing that issue, *Fable III* promises to be irresistible for co-op alone, regardless of any tweaks and attempts at streamlining. But we wonder if Lionhead might sometimes have overreacted to the demands for accessibility – threatening to reduce the depth of the magic system in favour of breadth of understanding.

Nonetheless, both Molyneux and Murray assert that the greatest leap that *Fable* is making is not in the development of its systems and mechanics, but in the arc of its story: in fulfilling or failing the difficult obligations that arise as king. Stepping beyond the good/bad

"YOU PLAY AS YOUR HERO, EVEN IN ANOTHER PERSON'S GAME. YOU CAN FORM A BUSINESS RELATIONSHIP OR EVEN GET MARRIED"

chicken costume. But all of these diversions – and marriage, particularly – are now lent greater significance and interest by the fact you can do them with another player.

"You've got split cameras in co-op now," says Murray, remembering the frustrations of being tethered to a single shared viewpoint in *Fable II*. "And you play as your hero, even if you join another person's game. You can form a business relationship with other players, or even get married and have children."

dichotomy takes the game into potentially political and profound territory, bearing witness to how morality is undermined by practicality, pulled in different directions by the responsibilities of power. But now you know how tough it is at the top, where next for *Fable*, we wonder?

"Oh, we always have so many ideas – we're always having to pull them back," says Murray. "Becoming king of one country – that's just the start, surely?"

Promise?





THE STORY OF DRAGON QUEST

THE CREATORS OF ONE OF JAPAN'S GREATEST GAME SERIES DISCUSS ITS FABLED HISTORY AND GLOBAL FUTURE

A whale which drives a fishing town to indolence by giving its people fish. A shopkeeper who dreams of being the world's greatest salesman. A town named after a hero who was abandoned to die by its people. A merman who dreams of avenging the wound he received when a fortune-teller tossed a crystal ball into his pool. A boy looking out over the sea from the shore of his lonely island, and wondering if there's anything out there.

Dragon Quest has some of the best stories in games. The nine titles in the main series might throw their players through sweeping, world-spanning epics, but it's their moving, small-scale dramas that really count. They cram more personality into a sprite and a couple of lines of dialogue than some cutscene-laden HD epics do in ten hours, forming patchworks of affecting, personal stories that have propelled the series' designer and scenario writer, **Yuji Horii**, into being one of the best-known game makers in Japan.

There, *Dragon Quest* is beaten only by *Pokémon* and *Mario* in sales, with the nine games selling around 35 million copies, and 53 million if you count all the spinoffs too. The release of a new *Dragon Quest* is an event – so much so that a well-worn tale says it's released on a Saturday rather than the usual Wednesday to avoid mass truancy and sick leave.

After all, *Dragon Quest* is the series which laid out the fundamentals of the Japanese RPG when it was released in 1986. It blended the quasi-medieval worlds and stark D&D mechanics of *Ultima*, *Wizardry* and Henk Rogers' *The Black Onyx*, which had introduced them to Japan just the year before, with Horii's sensibility for story and character designer Akira Toriyama's delightful manga visual stylings. From its very first iteration, *Dragon Quest*'s tight and familiar daisychain of play was set: simple battling earns XP and gold, which awards levels and buys equipment. This allows characters to access new areas of the overworld map and take on new bosses, propelling the story to its conclusion. Grinding is in and the challenge is high – the original *Dragon Quest*



Though *Dragon Quest IX* had been out in Japan for nearly a full year when we visited, the series still has major presence in shops, partly due to the recent release of *Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker 2* on DS

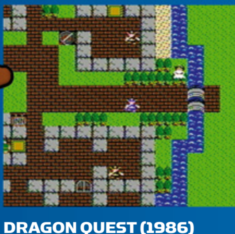
and many of its sequels offer little to do aside from their preordained paths of development – but their charm and simplicity made up for their difficulty.

Witness, for example, the first fight of every game, always against a blue slime, the series' mascot. Until *VIII*, battles were always viewed as if from a firstperson perspective, with static and then, in *VII*, animated enemy sprites facing you. The weak slime has a permanent smile and bright eyes; it's a shame to kill it – and indeed, you'll find friendly, talkative ones in some areas. Toriyama's design, a convivial teardrop, was his interpretation for Horii's order to create a "pool of slime" – hardly a threatening introduction to a game. Slime later constitutes greater challenge – the metal slime awards lots of XP, for example, but is hard to strike for damage above 1HP, and tends to run away; the king slime, which appears when eight slimes merge, boasts better attack and defence. But all slimes – and, in fact, most of *Dragon Quest*'s now vast bestiary – are charming and wittily imagined.

As such, accessibility is a watchword for the series. "At the first planning meeting we have on the main branch of the *Dragon Quest* games I remind myself that it must be easy to play," Horii tells us when we meet him at Square Enix's offices in Tokyo. "There has to be warmth and humanity in the game. Anyone should be able to pick up and play them."

There's the sense in most *Dragon Quest*s that they're playing you. Progression is so carefully measured that the point at which you've bought the best items from the shops in a certain location is precisely when the narrative pushes you into moving on too. Death is not punitive – you wake up at the local church with your XP intact but with only half the gold you were carrying. Trading XP against gold is an easy decision: XP wins every time. As with its characterisation, *Dragon Quest*'s design is painted in broad strokes but its effect is delicate and nuanced:

THE NINE QUESTS



DRAGON QUEST (1986)

All the blueprints were there from the start – turn-based battles, random encounters, an expansive overworld, slimes, Yuji Horii, Akira Toriyama and Koichi Sugiyama. Its story follows a quest to kill the Dragonlord, who has stolen the Ball of Light and kidnapped a princess. Along with grinding for gold and XP, players must find equipment owned by long-dead hero Roto to unlock the way to the Dragonlord's lair. It followed a year after seminal Japanese RPG *The Black Onyx*, and was released in the US in 1989 as *Dragon Warrior*.



DRAGON QUEST II (1987)

The first of the series to feature a party, though only of two others, and the first to have you save your game by talking to a priest, the second game in the series is set 100 years after the events of the first.

The Prince of Laurasia, a descendant of Roto, must avenge the attack by the evil wizard Hargon on Moonbrooke Castle. On his quest, he finds a ship which opens up the world for exploration, including the discovery of Alefgard, where the original game took place, while more balanced design reduced some of the grinding.



DRAGON QUEST III (1988)

Previously restricted to the name of your hero, customisation began with the third game's choice of either a male or female lead and its three party members able to take various classes. It's also possible to re-spec characters, allowing them to learn the skills of one class before returning to level one to add those of another. The story concerns the hero continuing his or her father's quest to kill the evil Baramos. Along the way, though, it adds more twists and turns than previous games, and shorter tales take place in its many regions.



DRAGON QUEST IV (1990)

With most of the series' ingredients in place, *IV* saw Horii start to play with them. Each of the game's first four chapters follows a different character, from the tomboy princess Alena to the travelling salesman Torneko. Torneko's story, in which he sets out to own the biggest shop in the world, is a wry play on the static item sellers that are a series staple, having you man his store and go out to collect stock by fighting battles. It's also the first in the series to feature a casino and the wagon, which houses followers who aren't in your main party.

you get the same set of spells in almost every game, but the rate at which the game grants them to you ascribes different ways you'll explore the world, whether carefree, because you can always Zoom back to any location you've already visited, or with caution, because you've only Heal to recharge your party.

Horii is now 56, working independently of Square Enix as a one-man production outfit called Armor Project, which is currently overseeing the creation of *Dragon Quest X* for Wii. He began his career as a freelance writer while programming games for himself on his PC. When he won a game-making contest sponsored by Enix, he got a foot in the door with the publisher with which he's remained until today. His first official game, 1983's *Portopia Renzoku Satsujin Jiken* [*The Portopia Serial Murder Case*] for the NEC PC-6001, was a detective-themed text adventure that he'd been compelled to make when he realised the popularity of the text adventure in the US and its rarity in Japan. The game was a success, and in making its NES port he worked with Koichi Nakamura, a fellow Enix programming contest winner who would go on to found Chunsoft, developer of the first five *Dragon Quest*s. It was Nakamura who proposed to Enix that he'd like to make an RPG – Kazuhiko Torishima, a manga editor who had worked with Toriyama, then approached Horii to be involved in the project, too.

"AT THE FIRST PLANNING MEETING I REMIND MYSELF IT MUST BE EASY TO PLAY, THERE HAS TO BE WARMTH AND HUMANITY. ANYONE SHOULD BE ABLE TO PICK UP AND PLAY THE GAMES"

Horii's touch will be familiar to those who appreciate *Chrono Trigger*'s blend of twisting saga, playful scenario design and close characterisation. That game, after all, was the result of collaboration between *Final Fantasy* producer Hironobu Sakaguchi and Horii and Toriyama. Rife with spoilt princes and mourning princesses, many of *Dragon Quest*'s stories involve the emotional costs of close ties, from the effects of death to the consequences of over-controlling, neglectful parents.

Dragon Quest V is probably the cornerstone of this theme, with the whole game being a light but moving examination of fatherhood. It starts with the hero as a child following his warrior father, who dies

Close to its Shibuya offices, Square Enix has a shop filled with merchandise relating to every aspect of its two key franchises





Akihabara secondhand videogame emporium Super Potato features mini-displays of *Dragon Quest* titles, including those for Famicom (left) and Super Famicom (right). The box and cartridge art is always drawn by Akira Toriyama, whose game work also includes the *Tobal* fighting series





DRAGON QUEST V (1992)

The strongest story of the series, and the first to debut on SNES, follows its hero from birth. It begins with him as a child and his warrior father, Pankraz. Pankraz dies defending his son from evil wizard Gema, who captures the hero as a slave. It takes ten years for him to escape and continue his father's quest to find a legendary hero – who turns out to be his own son. Simple but affecting, the story is supported by a new monster-capturing mechanic, allowing monsters to fight in your party, and various slime-themed minigames.



DRAGON QUEST VI (1995)

Chunsoft developed all previous *Dragon Quests*, but *VI* and *VII* were made by Heartbeat. Its class system harked back to *III*, but introduced the concept of super classes, gained by learning combinations of lower classes, and animated battle graphics. It also featured dual worlds – the land of dreams and the real world. The story has the hero waking up with amnesia after being overpowered by the demon king Maou Mudo, then questing to regain his memory and stop demon emperor Deathtamoor from merging the worlds together.



DRAGON QUEST VII (2000)

After a somewhat tortuous development this instalment, released on PS1 after PS2 had launched, was the largest yet and had symphonic music to match. The story sees a fisherman's son travelling to the past on 17 islands, each with its own story, to restore them in the present before a race to resurrect God. Though its 3D graphics, similar to those of the DS remakes of *IV*, *V* and *VI*, were new to the series, they were criticised for being antiquated, a point exacerbated by the fact it didn't reach the US until late 2001.



DRAGON QUEST VIII (2004)

Developer Heartbeat went out of business in 2002, passing production on *VIII* to Level-5, which had made its name making the thematically ambitious *Dark Cloud*. Despite its tremendous level of polish and beautiful design, *VIII* did little more than continue the series' slow evolution. After the sheer scope of *VII* and inventiveness of *IV*, *V* and *VI*, its story is simple, concerning defeating the evil force which has turned King Trode into a troll and his daughter into a horse, but *VIII* is still one of the best loved games in the series.



DRAGON QUEST IX (2009)

It took crafting *Dragon Quest* into a portable game to lend it the biggest leap in design since the series' inception. It also broke the series' sales record. Introducing co-op multiplayer hastened greater customisability of characters and a bare-bones story that's told with less detail than in epics like *VII*. The hero is an angel who has fallen from heaven and must do good to restore his wings. This, along with the decision to address the western dislike of random battles, brought a more freeform experience that's still rooted in the series' DNA.

STARTING THE QUEST

We talk to designer and writer **Yuji Horii**, composer **Koichi Sugiyama** and producer **Ryutaro Ichimura** about the creation of the *Dragon Quest* series.

Is the way you approach making a new *Dragon Quest* game in any way constant?
Yuji Horii: At the first planning meeting we have on the main branch of the *Dragon Quest* games, I remind myself that it must be easy to play. There has to be warmth in the game, some humanity in the game. Anyone should be able to pick up and play these games. Another important thing is what's new this time.

How much of a challenge is it to keep making one great *Dragon Quest* after another?
YH: You have no idea how challenging it is. The fact is, there are only five months between *Dragon Quest* and its sequel. *III* came a year after *II*. I need more and more time to make each new *Dragon Quest*. *IX* required five to six years to make. I need time to design something that I'm sure will be fun to experience. Also, I need more and more people, so it has been a huge collective adventure for us in making sure the *Dragon Quest* name remains strong.

Is it also difficult to make a new soundtrack for each sequel?
Koichi Sugiyama: You may have the same concept and the same genre but you should be able to make different music. An important memory I have from the first *Dragon Quest* is that the producer wanted to keep developing the series for a very long time. He had in his mind a very popular Japanese movie series named Tora-san, in which you find the same cast and identical storytelling, but each movie was different. The producer wanted to make that kind of series, and it's the same for the music. For each game, I make different tracks that share the same genre and concept. It's a very enjoyable challenge for me.

Why did you choose to introduce so many new elements to the series with *IX* – multiplayer, deep character customisation and the end of random battles?
Ryutaro Ichimura: It does look like a jump between *VIII* and *IX*, but the key to this is that we decided to put it on to DS. What's the DS good for? Simple, accessible multiplayer. So how do we make that more fun? If everyone has the same avatar, that's dull. It doesn't look great. So you have to add a level of customisation and that really opened up the playing field. Essentially, it's a chain of decisions.

Did that change the way you made a *Dragon Quest* game?
RI: The common points from *I* to *VIII* are that we had to start with a scenario and a game system. Horii-san will write that scenario. But what was different with *IX* is the volume of quests. Because we had to make so many, we had to take on an enormous number of people to make them. There are other things, too, because it's DS – Wi-Fi testing and content distribution; shop items are added every day. A new quest is added every week, so that's an ongoing process, and it's different to other games.

What was the specific idea behind *IX*'s multiplayer?
YH: The idea was to be able to instantly go multiplayer by just powering the console on. I wanted that kind of instant action. I believe that the network is fun but requires

protecting his son. The protagonist then takes on his father's quest to find the legendary hero who can deliver the world from evil, taking a wife and having children along the way. It ends with our character finding that his own son is that legendary hero. "It's emotionally moving for people playing the game because everyone at one time is a kid, and many become parents, so it's something everyone can relate to," Horii explains of his preoccupation.

Along with Horii and Toriyama, who is probably best known in Japan for developing *Dragon Ball*, the third perennial spoke of the series is composer **Koichi Sugiyama**. Having come on board after Enix noticed that he, a recognised TV director and composer, had sent back an appreciative Q&A card for one of its shogi (Japanese chess) games, he wrote symphonies for the NES, *Dragon Quest*'s first platform, producing a proud and complex central theme that has proven to effortlessly translate into being played by a full orchestra in *Dragon Quest VII* and *VIII*. "I only had three tracks to work with," he says of writing the music for the first game. A genial, chain-smoking 79-year-old, he's the most senior of the core team by some margin. "Melody, harmony and bass, these provide the skeleton for every piece I write for *Dragon Quest*," he explains.

"IT'S EMOTIONALLY MOVING FOR PEOPLE BECAUSE EVERYONE AT ONE TIME IS A KID, AND MANY BECOME PARENTS, SO IT'S SOMETHING EVERYONE CAN RELATE TO"





DQIX's tag mode inspired such congregations of players that a zone was set up in Akihabara to prevent them blocking the pavement

Square's *Final Fantasy* was released in late 1987, instigating a strong rivalry between the two publishers, one which, until the two companies merged in 2003, Enix was easily winning – on home turf, at least. *Dragon Quest* remains relatively unfamiliar in the west. Several games were released under the name *Dragon Warrior* in the US, but 2004's *Dragon Quest VIII* was the first to be released in Europe. As such, Japan accounts for over 90 per cent of all sales of the main *Dragon Quest* games.

The problems stemmed from even the first game, its Japanese cover art boasting Sugiyama's playful pitting of a boy swordsman against a paunchy blue dragon. The US *Dragon Warrior*, renamed due to a trademark clash with TSR's pen-and-paper RPG DragonQuest, seemed to promise a serious, violent edge through its title alone, and came in a box





featuring a lithe, adult fighter facing a sinuous, vicious-looking, if rather badly drawn, dragon against a background of flame. *Dragon Quest*'s homely setting and jolly slimes could only come as a shock.

Many of the subsequent releases were criticised for being old-fashioned, especially by the time their translations reached US shores. After 1992's *IV*, Enix didn't release a *Dragon Quest* in the US until *VII*, and that came out on PS1 in 2001, a year after PS2 had launched. It bore a typically slow introduction and its battle system was deemed 'primitive', its presentation



From left: Ryutaro Ichimura, Yuji Horii and Koichi Sugiyama

too many things to do like getting a provider, getting online and into a network. The DS was able to make the entire process smooth and instant, accessible without the need of great technical expertise. I had the idea that it could be fun to let players have fun together, even among family members – kids with their parents and so on. I had this hunch in my head that something very fun could be done here. That is why I decided to go with the DS.

Did you deliberately design *IX* so that it would have greater appeal for western audiences?
RI: Yes – you can tell from the menu screens. It's something we worked on from the very start. This was something we wanted to give to the world, not just Japan. The whole world has to access it, so it's something that permeates through the whole game.



Square Enix stretched *Dragon Quest*'s net still further when it opened Luida's Bar in Roppongi in January, a small themed cafe where aficionados can enjoy Slime Meat Buns (featuring eyes and mouth), Gigantes' Club (a vast turkey leg) and Chimera Wing Grill

'clunky'. Even *VIII*, which was celebrated for its detailed and beautifully rendered 3D world, was still faulted for its punitive, grind-friendly design.

What had been addressed in *VIII* was its localisation. Setting a style that would define the DS remakes of *IV* and *V* (and, later, *IX*), its distinctly British flavour and knowing references provide even greater character to the game – more so than the light medieval stylings of previous exports. Cockney ex-bandit Yangus calls the hero "guv" and comes from a town that "ain't no rose garden", while the party meets various characters who speak with accents from all over the world, each providing greater context for their personalities. 2008's DS release of *IV*, meanwhile, features a town called Bath, where the locals speak with phonetically expressed English west country accents – a reference, it turns out, to the magazine you're reading.

The localisation is down to the work of Richard Honeywood (now at Blizzard), translation director at Square Enix for *VIII* and the DS remakes, his team, and Square Enix's unusual localisation practice, in which localisation editors have final approval over the script rather than the development team. "I had little to do with it!" says Horii, but his intention for dialogue clearly matches Square Enix's: "As soon as a character starts to express themselves, you know who they are, their background. That was important." The effect is that since *VIII*, *Dragon Quest* has become better naturalised to western audiences, even if you can imagine the battles to convince US marketing teams of the value of British colloquialisms.

Square Enix regards its series as a sleeping giant, one that can match the success of *Final Fantasy*. And it's not alone. At a press conference in December 2008, Nintendo president **Satoru Iwata** pledged support to promote *Dragon Quest IX* outside of Japan. "At Nintendo, we were able to popularise the *Brain Age* series overseas, which was said to be unmarketable," he said. "I want to increase the number of people worldwide that understand the appeal of *Dragon Quest*, which represents all Japanese gaming culture… even if that only turns out to be a single person."

Dragon Quest IX is surely a good attempt at achieving that universal appeal. While it stays close to all of the series' core design principles, its introduction of cooperative multiplayer, its quick-paced battling and the removal of random battles play much closer to modern western tastes than previous games, even if it's difficult to imagine its tag mode having as much significance in the west. You hope that Nintendo's magic touch in promoting to a broad audience what used to be only the province of dedicated gamers will translate to *Dragon Quest*, too.

If the strategy is successful, *Dragon Quest* will finally be bringing its unique mix of hardcore challenge, accessibility and stories with the common touch to the world. It may have taken it 24 years to achieve it, but in an entertainment medium that's still frequently criticised for failing to tell great tales, it's better late than never.



***DQIX* maintains the 3D battles introduced in *VIII*, but *VIII* still has the best realisations of Toriyama's characters**

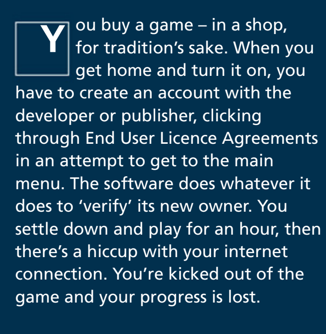

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LAW OF THE BRAND

WILL PUBLISHERS' ATTEMPTS TO ENFORCE COPYRIGHT HARM GAMING, OR SHOULD WE LEARN TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE DRM?



You buy a game – in a shop, for tradition's sake. When you get home and turn it on, you have to create an account with the developer or publisher, clicking through End User Licence Agreements in an attempt to get to the main menu. The software does whatever it does to 'verify' its new owner. You settle down and play for an hour, then there's a hiccup with your internet connection. You're kicked out of the game and your progress is lost.

The context isn't a simple one, and the debate is rarely balanced (one of the more nauseous spectacles of the past year involved the media's celebration of the circumvention of Ubisoft's DRM). The furore is certainly understandable from the consumer's perspective – some DRM measures require you to be online permanently when playing, for example.

But the developers and publishers – even the clumsy ones – are far from villains. They may be unable to agree on how best to prevent piracy, but they all have to do it. As **Olivier Comte**, VP of Namco Bandai Partners, says of Ubisoft's DRM: "I have no alternative today [and] it's better to do something than nothing." Ubisoft is adamant that its DRM is necessary to safeguard market share and to prevent the PC iterations of its titles cannibalising sales on other formats. There's piracy across the industry but it's overwhelmingly focused on PC, to the extent that German developer Crytek, a former cheerleader for the platform, says it will never develop exclusively for PC again.

THE FURORE IS UNDERSTANDABLE FROM THE CONSUMER'S PERSPECTIVE – SOME DRM MEASURES REQUIRE YOU TO BE ONLINE PERMANENTLY



Welcome to the wonderful world of Digital Rights Management – DRM – or, as the Free Software Foundation would have it, Digital Restrictions Management.

DRM is not quite all things to all men. With videogames, the term refers to security measures employed to protect software, almost exclusively on PC, from piracy. It also, for legitimate consumers, often means intrusive and unwelcome restrictions on something they've paid for, a system that seems designed to pre-empt the possibility of criminality rather than confront it.



Dragon Age: Origins has little DRM, but its use of online accounts from both publisher EA and developer BioWare has caused concern

Though its effectiveness and secondary motives can be debated (DRM conveniently hinders resale, another consumer right – no online PC games can be traded in through the Game group's stores or similar outlets), IP owners aren't just going to abandon trying to protect their products. Among the bigger publishers, DRM remains the common response to illegal use and distribution of their software because there just aren't any practical alternatives. Are there?

Within the industry, positions are polarised. Against those that say DRM is an essential for combating piracy is **Gabe Newell**'s take on the Russian market, where counterfeit software simply offered a better service in terms of localisation ("They're way ahead of us"), and Valve was able to improve its lot by improving this aspect of its products. **Jason Holtman**, Valve's director of business development, memorably summed things up with the line "rampant piracy is just unserved customers". If everyone was like Valve, the world would be a better place, of course, but plenty of other developers see the roots of an anti-piracy movement in positive reinforcement. Polish publisher CD Projekt's PC-exclusive RPG *The Witcher* provided additional content to legitimate consumers, rather than trying to punish those that try to score their software for free. Such was the success of this attitude that in 2009, CD Projekt removed all DRM measures from *The Witcher*. This followed 2008's establishment of GOG.com (Good Old Games), a portal that offers older titles from over 30 publishers, optimised for newer operating systems and free of DRM measures.

Then there's the middle ground. "Some IP owners think: 'Everyone who tells us that they've produced a protection method that cannot be cracked sees it cracked within a day, so why don't we just go with the concept that nothing beats having [our product] on the shelf and make our money by having it out there?'" says **Robert Bond**, IP and games law specialist at Speechly Bircham.

Outside of that, it's reward or punish, and the downsides of the latter are obvious. DRM is always uncompromising, and its restrictions run from irritating to profoundly limiting: there's the requirement of an internet connection just to activate a game, while others need a mandatory disc-check, and many more place a limit on the number of installations permitted. Look at almost any gaming forum and you'll find consumers complaining about what they feel is a compromised experience – proof positive of the old marketing adage that if a customer feels well treated they'll tell a handful of people, and if they feel badly treated they'll tell anyone who will listen. Try searching for "SecuROM" and you'll find endless paying consumers disgruntled about its presence on their legitimate copies of *Spore*, *Far Cry 2*, *Mass Effect* and *BioShock* – right alongside tips and downloads to remove SecuROM from your game.

SecuROM is a hate target for good reason: it stopped many people

LOOK AT ALMOST ANY GAMING FORUM AND YOU'LL FIND CONSUMERS COMPLAINING ABOUT WHAT THEY FEEL IS A COMPROMISED EXPERIENCE



SUCK FORTH MY SOUL

On April 1 2010, purchasers using the Gamestation website who clicked the standard T&Cs granted the firm a non-transferable, perpetual option "to claim, for now and forever more, your immortal soul". If notified by Gamestation, or one of its "authorised minions", you had to give it up within five business days. Notification could also be delivered through "6 (six) foot high letters of fire", and if such notification causes any damage you've already absolved Gamestation from any liability.

It's a great April fool's joke, and Gamestation emailed its customers abandoning its soul rights a few days later. Laughs aside, the interesting point is that surprisingly few consumers even noticed Gamestation's gag. Standard T&Cs like these, and those found in EULAs, are questionably enforceable for this very reason. Not that we're advocating taking a company to court for unexpected clauses in their EULA, of course.





At launch, *Far Cry 2* could be be activated on five separate computers, or configurations of hardware, at once. A subsequent patch removed this limitation, and the game can now be played even without its disc in the drive

playing their new copy of *BioShock* on release, and when shipped with *Spore* it resulted in the game's Amazon.com page being inundated with one-star reviews. The simple reason is that, from a consumer's perspective, it's extraordinarily poor stuff. SecuROM not only requires player activation for access to the game, but monitors the hardware it's being played on, limiting you to three installs. If you get a new computer, reformat your hard drive, or even upgrade your current hardware, SecuROM requires re-activation and eats up another of those precious three codes. Consumer anger led to EA upping the tally to five installs, but if you want to have several online-enabled user accounts playing *Spore*, a game built around exploring user-generated content online, then you need an activation for each of them.

The question of whether players are giving informed consent to such practices when they buy a game definitely needs examining (*Spore*'s DRM wasn't mentioned on the box or in advertising) – particularly as limited activations contradict a standard T&C in EULAs that allows for unlimited installs on hardware owned by the purchaser. But never mind pie in the sky – here's the fact of the matter: SecuROM did nothing. *Spore* was as widely pirated as had been expected, the DRM cracked within days, and the only people suffering were those who'd paid. The game was the most-pirated game of 2008, and to put the cherry on the cake a class action lawsuit was launched against EA by players at the end of the year.

So EA doesn't use SecuROM any more. It's a big achievement on the part of those who bought *Spore*, and player anger over DRM shouldn't be underestimated. "People are saying, 'Look, I'm not pirating this game – I've already bought it – but the effect of this DRM means I only have a limited number of installs'," says **Jas Purewal**, associate at law firm Olswang and author of game law website Gamer/Law (www.gamerlaw.co.uk). "'And so when I attempt to find a way around that I'm put in breach of IP and contract laws'." This point can't be emphasised enough: DRM measures can put the legitimate consumers of the games on the wrong side of the law.

Lawrence Lessig's book Code: And Other Laws of Cyberspace explains how regulators attempt to shape consumer behaviour. One of the tools they use is the application of the law, but Lessig argues that this is insufficient unless people are already disposed to act in the way that the law prescribes. Professor **Roger Brownsword**, director of The Centre for Technology, Ethics and Law in Society (TELOS), a specialist law research centre at King's College London, highlights other tools: "There are social norms that encourage people to behave in the way that their friends and family find acceptable, and another is market factors: if regulators want to incentivise or deter a particular pattern of behaviour, they can attempt to influence it with appropriate pricing."



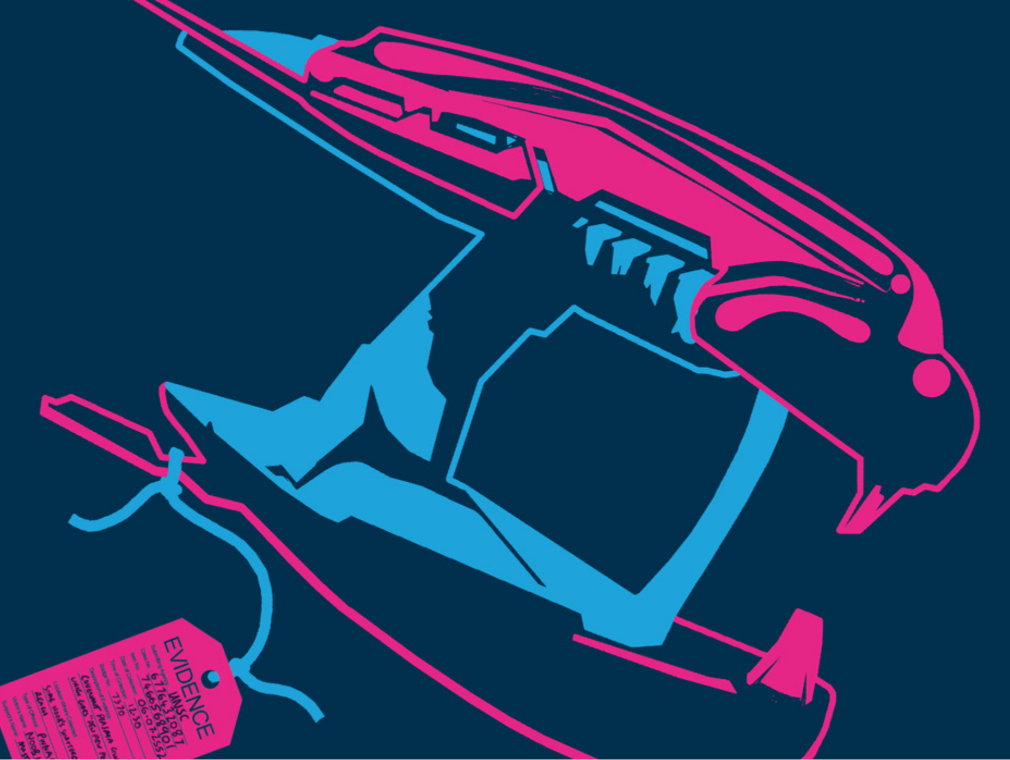




From top: Jas Purewal of Olswang, Robert Bond of Speechly Bircham and Roger Brownsword of King's College

The most effective aid, however, is undoubtedly one woven into the fabric of the product itself – and this is where DRM currently falls over. "The thinking behind this is that a design feature can be far more effective a determining factor than a law that says 'do not do this'," says Brownsword. "However, the protection built into some DRM systems can overreach their intended purpose and be far more protective than the law actually permits. They do not allow the fair use exemptions of other copyright law, for example."

Bond elaborates on this, explaining that certain DRM measures can discreetly track the hardware running the protected software – potentially placing the IP owner in breach of human rights and data protection laws. Consider a game like *Dragon Age: Origins*, which requires an online account to access PC DLC, and can theoretically link those personal details to the hardware's internet protocol address. No one's claiming this has ever happened, but the potential clearly exists. "When faced with these complications, some IP owners will simply say, 'This is going to go in the Too Hard tray, I'm going to get on with releasing the game on









Players of *Spore* (above), *BioShock* (top) and *Mass Effect* (top right) on PC have encountered controversies regarding the SecuROM DRM system. Each game must be authenticated online before it can be played

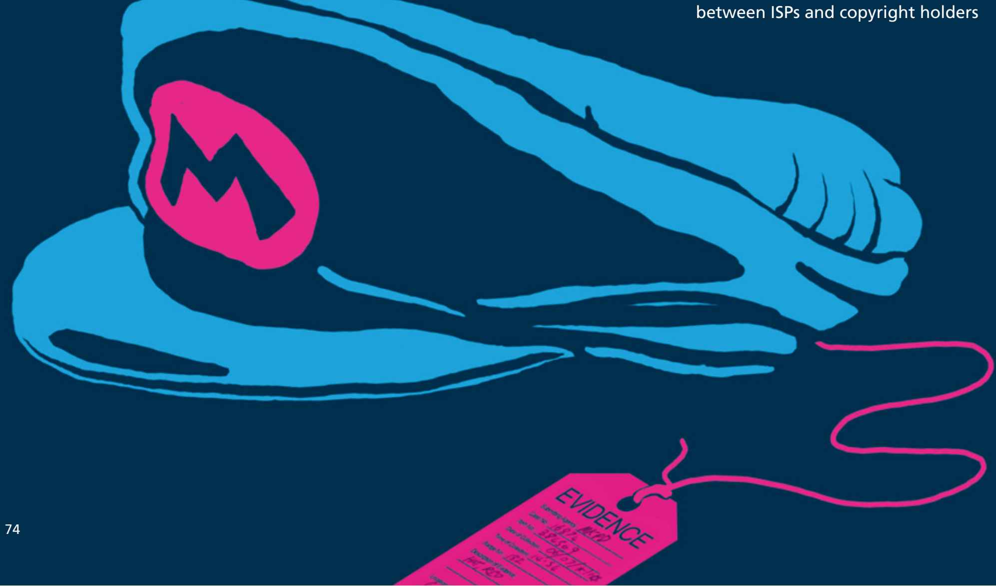
ENFORCEMENT ACTION CAN BE TAKEN AGAINST ILLEGAL DOWNLOADERS, ULTIMATELY RESULTING IN "TECHNICAL MEASURES"

to the market and make money by having the product out there.'"

This attitude will doubtless be bolstered by the latest legislative attempts to tackle the problem of piracy at its point of entry – and in the UK, the big debate has already taken place. The Labour government's dying days saw the passing of the Digital Economy Act in the 'wash-up period' – the lobbying both for and against was particularly intense, and those against saw the timing of its passing as a bit of a dodge. Regardless, as Purewal explains, one of the key aspects of the Digital Economy Act is that it mandates greater cooperation between ISPs and copyright holders (including game developers and publishers) to ensure that copyright materials are not illegally downloaded. In particular, a procedure has been introduced under which enforcement action can be taken against illegal downloaders, starting with warning notices to the ISP account holder and ultimately resulting in "technical measures", potentially including the temporary suspension of the illegal downloader's internet access.

The principles are still being worked out, but could clearly have serious implications when it comes to the matter of the illegal downloading of games. Purewal says: "You could well be seeing publishers taking enforcement action against illegal downloaders in an effort to curb game piracy – the Digital Economy Act mechanisms are intended to make enforcement easier."

As with all of these things, the crucial phrase remains "test case". For all the regulation, IP holders still have a grey area to negotiate before taking measures to defend their product. It's the cost/benefit analysis. Legal action, even when you're in the right, is risky. Not only are there fees, but customer perception has to be considered. If there's a choice, then breaking a butterfly on a wheel rarely seems worth the potential gain, so it's only in cases of particularly egregious copyright infringement







that IP owners will go as far as to take legal action.

At root, this is why DRM comes with baggage in the form of complex legal agreements that have to be signed by end users (a depressing term), and can stand in the way of you actually being able to play your game because your internet connection faltered for a minute. The legal issues around their forced implementation will eventually be cleared up – law is, by its nature, a slow-moving force, and is playing catch-up in gaming's fast-paced environment. "All legal developments take time, take discussion, take disputes and, over the course of time, a position may be established," says Purewal. "We'll see a very different virtual landscape over the next five to ten years."

And what will that be? Selling games is the business of game makers, and the sheer financial cost of creating and nurturing that experience provides the weight behind anti-piracy measures. It's not like EA or Ubisoft enjoy investing in these technologies and being taken to task by unhappy customers. Barring an inconceivably consumer-focused change to copyright law in the future, DRM will have its hooks in almost every game you play over the next ten years – but, with the (increasingly justified) assumption that players will always be connected, the hooks will become less noticeable and inconvenient.

It won't be demanding you register your game, it won't automatically disconnect for a few seconds of downtime, and it won't stop you from multiple installs on the myriad gadgets of the near future. It won't disappear, either, until the day online IDs sync across all platforms and products, which is probably much further away than it should be. Until then, there's always Steam. DRM is improving, demanding less player input and fewer needless installs, and it's nowhere near as interfering as even two years ago. And that's all that customers really want – to play the game they've paid for.

DIGITAL RESTRICTIONS MANAGEMENT

Defective by Design (www.defectivebydesign.org) is a campaign by the Free Software Foundation which sees DRM as ethically unjustifiable – indeed, "an anti-social technology". The primary targets aren't games per se, but devices like iPhone and Kindle, and DRM terminology itself (Digital Restrictions Management, according to this campaign, because its primary purpose is to limit consumer control over software). This perspective holds that consumer rights like resale, private copying and sharing are simply being blocked by DRM. Whether this is actually the case, and DRM is infringing consumer's rights, awaits a test case.





The Witcher **had its DRM measures removed with patch 1.5, something still relatively rare in gaming despite the positive reception it recieved**


ARCADE
FIRE

AS VIDEOGAMES BECOME MORE VARIED AND MAINSTREAM, WE MEET A GROUP OF COLLECTORS WHO WANT TO RETURN TO THE BRUTAL BASICS AND RAW ENJOYMENT OF '80S COIN-OPS

"Modern cars…" growls Mickey Rourke's Marv in Sin City. "They all look like electric shavers."

Where's the soul? The visionary shimmer? A gear-stick that's a workout not a wimp-out? The ragged rumble of an engine designed to roar not whisper? There's a subculture of gamers who feel the same way.

For a brief period – roughly between 1980 and 1985 – videogames flashed across custom screens encased in hulking, coin-operated cabinets daubed with inventive, seductive comic-book artwork. In the US, the cabinets were viewed as wholesome and legitimate entertainment; robust revenue-earners lining the walls of bowling alleys and family food joints.

In the UK, they were mostly herded together into thrillingly sleazy digital ghettos; blaring, bleeping arenas known as 'amusement arcades' where gamers competed side by side for social standing based on high-score kudos.

In the days before gamefaqs.com, expert players were studied for tips and tricks, paths and patterns, dastardly design exploits and subtle twitches of muscle memory.

And while some of the coin-ops crossed over (*Space Invaders*, *Pac-Man*, *Donkey Kong*) and spun off into music hits, breakfast cereals and money-printing home console versions, others (*Asteroids*, *Defender*, *Tempest*) were rougher, tougher sells: cult classics too hot-headed and hardwired for mass appeal. Towards the end of the arcade boom, a Disney movie, Tron, revelled in the fantasy of elite players being zapped on to a virtual 'game-grid' and recast as digital gladiators in a world where gaming skill was a matter of life and death.

And then came the bust. A mix of market saturation and home console/computer popularity stifled the scene. Arcades closed or diversified into gambling halls. The cabinets – too bulky to store, too unprofitable to keep switched on – were either torched or put out to pasture on resort piers.

But today, some players who were teenagers in the '80s are dedicating themselves to keeping the coin-op flame flickering. Back then, they were rattling through the coin trays for spare change – one last go before tea time. Today, they have the space, freedom and bank balances to reanimate the sleeping giants of their youth.

The thought of 30- or 40-something men revisiting childhood pleasures usually sparks sneering about mid-life crises and arrested nerdishness. But this isn't just an indulgence in dewy-eyed nostalgia or luddite 'retro' archness.

It's about passion, not obsession. No one here is using the games to fill a void, mask a deficiency or smother a loss. Most collectors are moneyed and married with a healthy sense of how and why their teenage lust has evolved into enduring love. We meet four of them to discover their stories.

























THE CURATOR

Dom Escott, 40, Chichester
Favourite game: ***Sinistar* (1982)**
Cabinets owned: **100**

"The strange thing is, I'm not really a player. I'm actually terrible at every single game I own. I do play modern games – *Half-Life*, *Left 4 Dead*, all that. But I consider the '80s coin-ops an artform in their own right. It's why I've gone to great effort to get the originals rather than settle for copies.

"The first thing I tried to get was a *Joust* machine. I went to a place in Portsmouth to pick it up and when I was there the bailiffs arrived and closed the place down, so I couldn't get to it. Scandalously, some of the machines got chucked off the pier into the sea.

"Then I got an *R-Type* – one of my most-played games in the '80s. It was the thrill of the chase, really. I had to import it through America into Canada and then over to the UK. After that, I went to the house of a fellow in Wales to pick up a *Defender*. Turned out he was splitting up with his wife and they'd just bought this house. So they decided the best thing to do would be to just let the place be repossessed – including a garage full of cabs. I couldn't believe my luck. He was happy to let me drive off with all 25 of them!

"A few years ago, I took an early retirement package and started a business called Retrokade [tinyurl.com/retrokade]. The aim was to develop an archive of arcade cabs and turn it into a private enthusiasts' club. At its peak, I had about 150 cabs and we were talking to people like Nintendo about partnership. But it never really took off and when the London mayor rejected the venture as too competitive with the Namco Station at County Hall, I sort of lost the spirit.

"It's a shame because they have a great place in the US called Funspot [see funspotnh.com] and I'm sure something similar would do well in London.

"Of course, there is an element of nostalgia about collecting '80s coin-ops – they remind me of my youth and having to sneak off and play them because my parents didn't approve. But whereas getting good at modern games seems to be all about understanding a fairly limited range of skills, '80s cabs are much less forgiving – they feel more hostile. Instead of you against the game designer, it feels like you against the machine."





Arcade art

Today's games come in rectangular slabs of plastic, but '80s coin-ops had to work on their looks...

Tempest
(Atari, 1980)

Escott: "It's the angle and shape of the cab. It reminds me of the Delorean, the Lotus Esprit… It's a unique shape. It also looks like its game – it has an angular air of vector graphics about it. Everything is warping like the levels themselves. Even the side art and control panel – everything is leading you into it. And nothing else was made in the same shape. It's a one-off."

Star Wars
(Atari, 1983)

"It's a classic example of how to properly brand a game based on a movie. Everything looks like something a Stormtrooper might be using. It's authentic artwork, too. It doesn't look like someone unofficial has tried to appropriate the film's imagery."

Discs Of Tron
(Bally Midway, 1983)

"A fantastic ambient cab that's atmospheric and immersive. It's a good example of the idealism at the time – an expensive, individually designed cabinet that's unwieldy and unfriendly but has a lot of personality."

Tapper
(Bally Midway, 1983)

"A fantastic bespoke cab with lots of humour and style. The beer-tab can take a bit of wear and tear, though. The root-beer version is poor, too, but they had to do it because someone eventually realised that licensing beer-based games to kids wasn't a good idea."

Defender
(Williams, 1980)

"When I was trading to make ends meet, I'd never turn away a *Defender* machine. Everybody remembers it because it had fantastic distribution – it was in every motorway service-station in the country. And just look at it. It's so beautiful and unique. The artwork is fantastic and the control panel is probably the most recognisable piece of cab design from the era."











THE PLAYER

Greg Mott, 42, Dorset
Favourite game: ***Robotron* (1982)**
Cabinets owned: **17**

"I remember in the early '90s, having a chat with some mates in a pub – reminiscing about the old arcades and thinking it'd be cool to bring some of that back. I grew up in the Isle Of Wight and the games tended to survive a bit longer out there.

"I bought my first game – *Joust* – in 1992 from an arcade in Sandown. £150. I'm an accountant, so I was delighted with that. Then I got a *Defender* and started touring around old arcades, seeing what they had and what was for sale.

"I don't play modern games at all. I've got a Wii – mainly for multiplayer games. But firstperson shooters or story-based games… I've never had the patience for them. They always seem to be focused on an ending rather than points-scoring which is what I enjoy most. Most of the games I like are the ones with dedicated control panels which can't be copied or emulated. It's like a classic car thing – the original art and cabinet and physicality is all part of the appeal.

"Everyone has a balance of collector/gamer/restorer in their reasons for doing it. I'm mostly a gamer – I want the games to play them, but I've had to learn a bit of the restoration aspect to keep them going. You do get a lot of satisfaction from getting into the machinery and fixing up games.

"The pinball scene is growing a lot now, too. I currently run the UK Pinball League [ukpinballleague.co.uk] and we travel around the country, meeting up for competitions and socials. I'd like to see more of that kind of thing for '80s videogames.

"But I mostly just love playing the games, battling to beat the highest scores. I've been to Funspot twice and made it into the top ten of a few games. For my home arcade, I wanted to do it properly so since *Robotron* is my favourite game I have a carpet featuring all of the game's imagery – I took screenshots from MAME and had it all custom made.

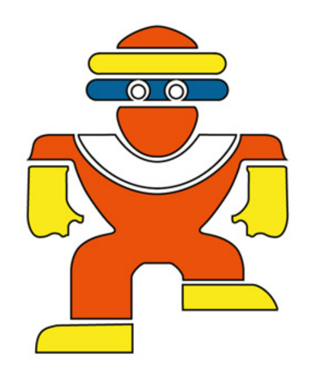
"For me, although the '80s coin-op games have much simpler gameplay, there's a higher skill element. Also, the modern 3D games make me physically sick – all the bobbing around… If you put modern gamers on '80s arcade games, they'd struggle. That's because the games have been designed to be immediately difficult, with steep learning curves – in order to kick you off and make way for the next person's money. Modern games are designed to be friendly and give you a rounded, repeatable – usually quite cinematic – experience.

"Older games were more about the gameplay, while modern games are all about the graphics. I also miss the social aspect of going to arcades, getting together with mates, having challenges. That all happens online now, of course, but it's always better in the same room with a bunch of mates.

"I'm currently gunning for a guy who's recently broken 1,000,000 on *Robotron* with five lives and no extras. I'm practising hard – up to 636K now. It's hardly King Of Kong, but it's the aspect I always enjoyed so it feels good to be taking on a serious score challenge again."









THE COLLECTOR

Oliver Moazzezi, 30, Southampton
Favourite game: ***Star Wars* (1983)**
Cabinets owned: **"Around 100"**

"I started collecting when I was 18 after getting the MAME bug at university. I was playing '80s coin-ops on the piers at Portsmouth because they survived there for a lot longer. I remember *Pole Position*, *Tron*, *Discs Of Tron*… They lasted until about '88 or '89. After we'd finished playing the newer games, we used to turn to the older stuff because the cabs were all still 10p a go.

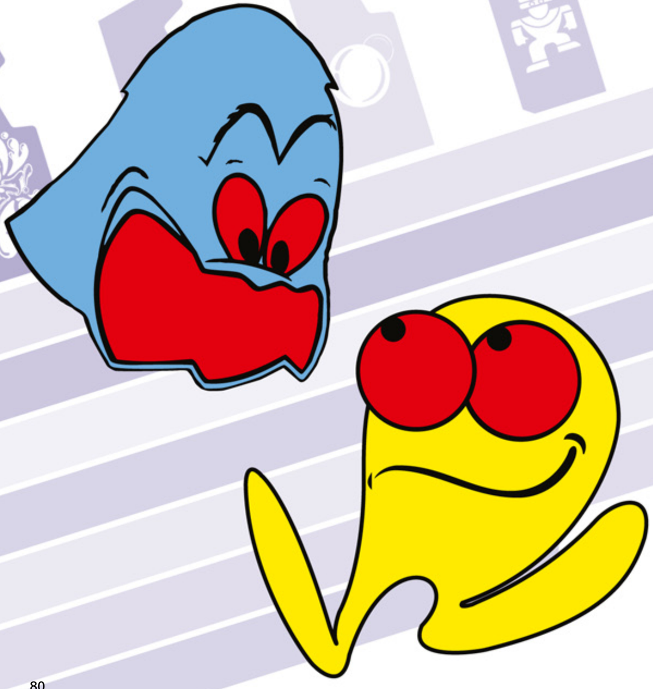
"My thing is obscure Atari stuff. I love the Atari games and I'm heavily into the artwork – I just love the look of the machines. If a game looks good and the artwork is good, then I'll have it – I don't care if it's working or not.

"But it all started with MAME and a website called Dave's Classic Arcade Tips & Tricks. It's closed down now but whoever Dave is, I'd love to buy him a beer.

"My first cab was a crappy JAMMA thing which I got for £25 from Bognor Regis. The JAMMAs are interchangeable boards that support multiple games – the kind of cabs that were cheap to rent. You used to find them in chippies. My girlfriend at the time, her dad was a lorry driver, so I borrowed his lorry and went driving on to all these rickety piers to collect machines.

"I remember finding a *Pac-Man* sitting all alone by the cafe in one of the arcades. I was begging the owner to sell it to me but he wasn't budging. Eventually he said I could have it for however much it had made over the last last financial year – which was £175. Bargain.

"But I generally like getting the really obscure or odd games – things like *Zoo Keeper*, *Space Panic*, *Crazy Climber*… I do play modern games – I've got a PS3 and 360 – but I loved the high-score element of the '80s games. Running round all the arcades and sticking your initials at the top of the tables. That culture has come back a bit with Xbox Live Arcade, but there's nothing like being in the same room with equally passionate people, competing."





Objects of desire

The top five '80s coin-op rarities

1. *Quantum* (Atari, 1982)
An ultra-rare vector-graphic trackball game based on the deft and precise surrounding of particles. Concept recently reworked into the iPhone/ iPhone Touch game *Spirit*.

2. *Missile Command* (Atari, 1980)
Iconic, apocalypse-averting shooter. Only 100 of the cockpit versions were made. Subject of a heartbreaking indie documentary about one man's attempt to beat the world record [www.highscoremovie.com].

3. *Blaster* (Williams, 1983)
Technically dazzling 3D space shooter developed as a semi-sequel to *Robotron*. Originally released in a cylindrical plastic cabinet, the wooden replacement is now the rarity.

4. *Reactor* (Gottlieb, 1982)
Released at the height of Cold War nuclear-power anxiety. Keep the reactor core cool by repelling the swarms of evil particles. Second only to *Mad Planets* for pummelling, techno-inspiring sound effects.

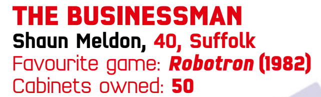
5. *Major Havoc* (Atari, 1983)
Beautifully precise vector shoot 'em up that somehow successfully combined space blasting with platform gaming.











THE BUSINESSMAN

Shaun Meldon, 40, Suffolk
Favourite game: ***Robotron* (1982)**
Cabinets owned: **50**

"With me, it's an out-of-control hobby. In 1994, I bought a *Robotron* machine and stuck it in the corner of our flat. My wife wasn't impressed – I couldn't really claim it was furniture or stick a throw-rug over it or something.

"So I bought a few more, rented a little storage unit and, over the next five or six years, the collection slowly grew until I had to switch to bigger and bigger storage units. The number of machines grew quickly because, at one point, every time I heard about a cab I'd hunt it down and buy it.

"Back in the '80s I used to go to Torquay and Paignton with my nan. It was a wonderland. All the arcades were full of the latest games. I've never lost that excitement or appreciation of the look and feel of the machines – the art design, all the different kinds of control mechanics.

"About a year ago, it occurred to me that I could turn the collection into some kind of business. So we took a big storage unit here in rural Suffolk, called it the Arcade Barn and organised open days and charity events – we collected around £700 for Children In Need. This year, we're hoping to move to a more central location, maybe somewhere in Exeter.

"I don't think it could ever work as a standalone business. It's too niche. We'd never make money. But I would like to make it work as a 'cost-neutral' enterprise – something that pretty much pays for itself. We'll charge people for the open days and hopefully pull in enough to do a few every season. We'll have to close when the weather turns cold as the machines would all start breaking down.

"It's great to see all the people coming in for different reasons. We had one open day where two brothers – they were both postmen – spent the whole day playing *Defender*, pushing each other around, bantering, trying to get the day's best score. That's a big part of the buzz for me – seeing other people enjoying what I enjoy, watching that friendly competition coming out in players who haven't acted that way since they were kids.

"At the Children In Need day, people were queuing up to play *Track 'N' Field*. It took a serious hammering and we had to replace the buttons.

"But that's the appeal. You can play versions of these games on Xbox Live and MAME and on your smartphone, but there's nothing like playing the originals with the original controllers. You need the full theatrical element of it – with people watching, ideally. It can feel almost like a performance.

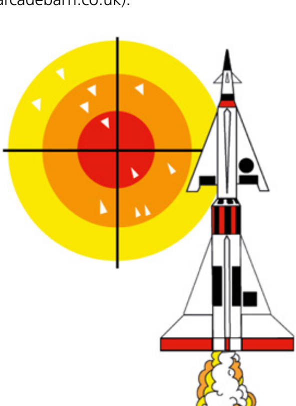
"One of my aims is to alert potential gamers to the scene's very existence. There's a big chunk of 'our generation' who simply don't know that these machines are still around and playable. It's all about letting them know. But I'm sure they're out there – build it and they'll come."

Arcade Barn is now open for the 2010 season (contact Shaun via www.arcadebarn.co.uk).









WHEN VIDEOGAMES RULED THE WORLD

IN THIS EDITED EXTRACT FROM HIS NEW BOOK, REPLAY: THE HISTORY OF VIDEO GAMES, TRISTAN DONOVAN TRACES THE ORIGINS OF THE ELECTRONIC GAMING REVOLUTION



It's the summer of 1982 and North America is in the grip of videogame mania. In the four years since *Space Invaders* made its Japanese debut, videogames had exploded in popularity. Back in 1978 the US sales of home and coin-operated games stood at $454 million; 48 months later, in 1982, that figure had soared to $5,313 million. To put it another way, the videogame business was expanding by a massive five per cent a month. Excitement about videogames pervaded every corner of American life. The public's seemingly insatiable appetite for electronic play had transformed the retail landscape. Arcades had sprung up in every mall and high street. Coin-op games could be found in launderettes, movie theatres, cocktail lounges, hotels and restaurants. Even supermarkets were installing videogames for their customers to play. "Arcade locations were like Starbucks back then – literally everywhere," says **Scott Miller**, who wrote columns for the Dallas Morning News about videogames at the time. There was no respite at home either, as millions upon millions of Atari VCS 2600 consoles had embedded themselves under the nation's TV sets.

"THE MEDIA, IN PARTICULAR, WAS AMAZED BY PLAYERS WHO COULD ACTUALLY BEAT THE GAMES. IT WAS THIS PERCEPTION OF 'MAN VERSUS MACHINE' THAT MADE MANY NEWS STORIES SO INTRIGUING"

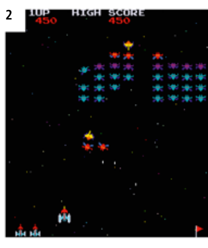
Journalists marvelled at the dazzling success of the videogame. They pored over analyst reports suggesting that videogames would soon be bigger than film and music combined. They interviewed fresh-faced game designers who boasted about how they had spent royalty cheques and bonus payments worth tens of thousands of dollars on a celebrity lifestyle of fast cars and flash pads. And they wrote about the new 'pinball wizards' – the hot-shot players who were the masters of the arcades. "The public and the media were fascinated by the videogame," says **Walter Day**, founder of Twin Galaxies, which started life as a small arcade in Ottumwa, Iowa, before turning itself into the official keeper of videogame high score records. "The media, in particular, was amazed by players who could actually beat the games. It was this perception of 'man versus machine' that made many news stories so intriguing to the public."

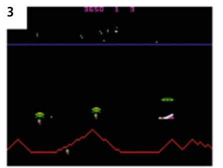
Everyone wanted a piece of videogames, from the movers and shakers of Washington DC to the studio bosses of Hollywood. Star Wars director George Lucas set about forming a games division at his company Lucasfilm. Walt Disney Pictures sought to cash in with Tron, a film about a man trapped inside a videogame that was touted as a summer blockbuster. Guides explaining how to beat arcade machines clogged up the bestseller lists. Quaker Oats, Parker Brothers, 20th Century Fox and Thorn EMI formed videogame divisions. McDonald's started serving Atari-themed burger meals where "thanks to McDonald's and Atari, the old-fashioned TV dinner is being replaced by an exciting video-dinner that could make you a winner". And if a burger, fries and shake were too much, you could snack on a packet of Universal Foods' Pretzel Invaders. In Washington DC, a group of young Democrats – including future presidential candidate Al Gore – became known as the Atari Democrats for their support for giving tax breaks to high-tech industries rather than older manufacturing industries such as steel and cars. As Time magazine's cover declared in late 1981: "Gronk! Flash! Zap! Video Games Are Blitzing The World".

The blitz began with *Space Invaders*. Its success reignited interest in videogames just as a trinity of technological and cost breakthroughs allowed for a major leap forward in the quality and vision of games being released in the arcades. The first development was the microprocessor and the design freedom it granted game developers, the second and third were improvements in videogame visuals: high-resolution vector graphics and colour games. Both came to fruition in 1979. Vector graphics had existed for years, but had always been too expensive for use in the arcades. Standard TVs, also known as raster scan monitors, build images out of a series of horizontal lines that are drawn in turn left to right starting from the top. Using this method a TV can create a full-screen image once every 50th or 60th of a second. Vector monitors take a different approach.

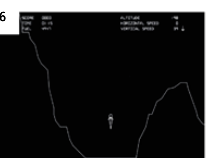
Instead of building complete pictures, they draw pencil-thin white lines between two co-ordinates on the screen. While poor at drawing complete images, vector graphics were perfect for drawing crisp, smooth outlines that were also brighter than the images created by standard TVs. "The resolution of raster games was not so great in those days," says **Owen Rubin**, an Atari engineer who started out making vector graphics games on his university's computers. "The graphics of a vector monitor were extremely sharp and, for the time, very high resolution. They just looked very good." Vector graphics first came to the arcade thanks to Larry Rosenthal, an engineer who, like Atari founder Nolan Bushnell, wanted to bring *Spacewar!* to the arcades. He built the Vectorbeam system that made vector graphics cheap enough to use in arcade games and used it to make *Space Wars*, an arcade version of the Tech Model Railroad Club's game.

Rosenthal hoped arcade manufacturers would buy the rights to the game, and most were interested. But when Rosenthal insisted on getting half of the profits, potential buyers such as Atari walked away. Having alienated the big players, Rosenthal found himself pitching the system to small-fry videogame companies. One of these was Cinematronics of El Cajon, California. Cinematronics was in bad shape when Rosenthal got in touch. The company had released two unsuccessful games and was on its last legs, so figuring it had nothing to lose, it accepted Rosenthal's high price. In October 1977 *Space Wars* went on sale, introducing vector graphics to the arcades for the first time. The game's distinctive ghostly outline visuals helped Cinematronics shift 10,000 machines, saving it from the brink of closure. Cinematronics' relationship with Rosenthal would be short lived. Rosenthal felt he wasn't earning enough from the game and walked out, taking his Vectorbeam system with him. After a legal tussle, Cinematronics paid Rosenthal for the rights to use the Vectorbeam technology and set about trying to become the premier creator of vector graphics arcade games. To help it develop more vector games the company hired **Tim Skelly**, a

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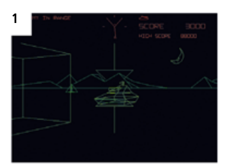
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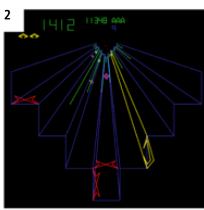
1. Taito's 1978 classic *Space Invaders*, which was originally to be called *Space Monsters*. 2. Namco's 1979 *Galaxian* brought colour to the space shooter genre. 3. 1980's super-tough *Defender*. 4. Namco's *Pac-Man* (1980) succeeded in attracting female audiences. 5. *Spacewar!*, made in 1962, is regarded as the first true videogame. 6. Vector graphics pioneer *Lunar Lander* from 1979

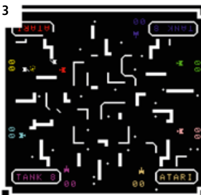
programmer whose journey into videogames began with a night out at The Sub's Pub in Kansas City. "A guy walked into the bar room with a computer under his arm. Seriously," he says. "Of course you talk when someone walks into a bar with odd company or artefacts."

The man with the computer was Douglas Pratt, and he planned to open a videogame arcade. Skelly decided to go into business with him: "I had my doubts, but almost anything was better than just making sandwiches." The venture failed, but gave Skelly enough experience to land a job at Cinematronics designing their new vector games. Skelly loved the visuals: "It was different from what other games were using. The best part was that we could do smooth rotations at high speed. Vector games were much more fluid and fine-grained. Raster, chunky. Vector, smooth. I liked smooth." Skelly's first vector games started rolling off the production line in early 1979. They ranged from the 3D dogfights in space of *Tailgunner* to *Warrior*, an overhead view sword-fighting game where players controlled two smoothly animated warriors carrying long swords. By then, however, Atari had caught up. In the wake of *Space Wars*, Atari's research and development team in Grass Valley, California, had got to work on vector graphics technology of its own and by early 1978 had a working prototype to show the company's coin-op team. "It wasn't much more than a demonstration test bed, but it clearly demonstrated that cool vector images could be displayed," says Atari engineer **Howard Delman**, who teamed up with a fellow coin-op engineer, Rick Moncrief, to turn the prototype into a usable device. Having refined the prototype, Delman decided Atari's first venture into vectors should be a remake of the moon landing game *Lunar Lander*, a 1973 remake of the 1969 text-only computer game *Lunar* that used the vector graphics abilities of the DEC GT40 terminal. "I had previously seen the game and thought it would be a good choice to demonstrate the look and feel of our new technology," he says.

Released in early 1979, Atari's *Lunar Lander* was a delicate realtime battle against gravity that challenged players to land their craft on the moon's mountainous landscape before their limited supply of fuel ran dry. It was an impressive demonstration of

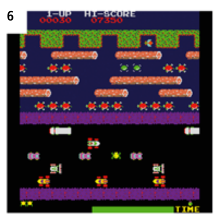
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1. Atari's 3D tank sim, *Battlezone*. 2. 1981's *Tempest*, a game that still resonates today in the design of titles such as *Space Giraffe*. 3. 1978's multiplayer *Tank 8*. 4. Developed by Namco in 1981, *Galaga* is still seeing sequels today, with *Galaga Legions* on Xbox Live Arcade. 5. Namco's 1980 game *Rally-X* runs on the same hardware as *Pac-Man*. 6. Konami's 1981 *Frogger* also lives on via XBLA

what vectors could do, but it would be *Asteroids*, Atari's second venture into vector graphics, that really caught the public imagination. *Asteroids* began with a meeting between programmer **Ed Logg**, who had done some of the work on *Lunar Lander*, and Lyle Rains, vice-president of the coin-op games division. "I get called into Lyle's office and he goes: 'I've got an idea for a game'," says Logg. Rains suggested a game where players controlled a spaceship that had to blow up asteroids, splitting them into smaller and smaller chunks of cosmic debris until they vanished altogether. The challenge would be to avoid colliding into the asteroid fragments. Logg decided it should use vectors: "Vector monitors are high resolution. They are 1064 by 728 pixels whereas standard rasters are 320 by 240 – a big difference in resolution, so when you turn your ship you can tell which direction it's facing, which is really important."

Logg developed the rock smashing idea by turning it into a balancing act. Trigger happy players risked being overwhelmed by the volume of asteroids floating around the screen while those who did too little would find themselves under attack from the flying saucers that Logg created to force players to act. The tension between action and inaction was enhanced by the sound effects created by Delman, which echoed the ominous thumping beat that the aliens of *Space Invaders* marched to. "I tried to create the sound of a heartbeat," says Delman. "My sense was that the player's heart rate would be increasing as the game got more frenetic, and I wanted the player, subconsciously, to be hearing his own heart racing." *Asteroids* became the most popular game ever made by Atari and the second biggest arcade game of 1979 – outdone only by *Space Invaders*. Atari followed it up with a spate of popular vector games, most notably **Ed Rotberg**'s 1980 game *Battlezone*, a futuristic tank battle viewed from within the player's tank. "Given that we now had the vector generator technology, it seemed like a natural follow on to the successful *Tank* and *Tank-8* arcade games for Atari," says Rotberg. The game's 3D visuals inspired a group of retired US Army generals to ask Atari to remake it as a training simulation to help soldiers learn to drive the Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicle. Atari's management readily agreed to the idea and then told Rotberg. "I was told about it after the prototype had been promised – and on a very aggressive schedule," he says. "I was not pleased. I felt that Atari should not be doing government/military products. Back at the time, most of us could have gotten jobs in the military-industrial complex if we had wanted to. Many of us were still very much affected by what had happened during the Vietnam War. Most of us had pacifistic leanings at that time, myself included. I simply did not want to work on a product that would help people learn how to kill other people." As the only person capable to meeting the generals' deadline, Rotberg agreed to do the prototype but on the condition that he would never work on a similar product. After three months of toil he completed the Bradley Trainer prototype, but it never went beyond that stage.

The crisp outlines of vector games were an exciting departure from the blocky monochrome of old. But by the end of 1979 the arrival of colour graphics was proving even more exciting. Prior to 1979, almost every arcade videogame was black and white. The closest they got was the use of transparent coloured plastic to create an illusion of colour in particular areas of the screen. *Breakout* used this approach to make its bricks different colours, while *Space Invaders* had a strip of green plastic glued to the bottom of the screen to colour in the player's missile launcher and shields. "Colour was not added for some time because of cost, both for the monitor and the additional hardware needed to support colour," says Rubin. "At the time, it was not a trivial change. A few games, like an eightplayer *Tank* game, were tested in colour – it was the only way to have eight players look different – but for most of the games we were doing, colour did not add a lot."

But on the other side of the Pacific from Atari, Namco – the company that bought the wreckage of Atari Japan in 1974 – had come up with one of the first full-colour videogames: *Galaxian*. It was a *Space Invaders* clone that removed the shields and added aliens that dive-bombed players. Colour proved a powerful selling point and made *Galaxian* a huge success. Other game developers were inspired to follow suit. **Dona Bailey**, a car sensors programmer at General Motors, was inspired to leave the car industry for

Atari after seeing the colours of *Galaxian*: "I adored *Galaxian*, I thought it was intensely beautiful. Its repetition of patterns, its colours and its swooping and swerving motions. I wanted to make something that seemed as beautiful to me." *Galaxian*'s rougher, tougher remake of *Space Invaders* also proved influential, marking the start of a rapid evolution in shoot 'em ups that saw them crank up the intensity of their man versus machine challenge. Atari's Dave Theurer served up energetic shooting games based on nightmares. His 1980 game *Missile Command*, a trackball-enhanced scramble to protect cities from never-ending barrages of nuclear missiles, came out of Cold War nightmares of nuclear war. Theurer's next creation, 1981's *Tempest*, was a colour vector graphics game based on a nightmare he had about monsters coming out of a hole. It challenged players to zap strange abstract shapes that crawled out of a cylindrical 3D pit. Not to be outdone, Namco continued to hone the aggression of *Galaxian* with 1981's *Galaga* – a sequel that handed the aliens new tricks such as tractor beams used to try and capture the player's craft.

But none of these were as angry as *Defender*, the ferocious shoot 'em up created by **Eugene Jarvis** that marked leading pinball manufacturer Williams' return to the videogame business. Jarvis joined Williams as a pinball designer after a stint at Atari's ill-fated pinball division. Williams had dabbled in videogames in the wake of *Pong*, but quickly reverted back to pinball tables. By the end of the 1970s it was clear the decision to walk away was a mistake. "We all could see a revolution happening in videogames. It was a no brainer to bullshit management into blowing a few hundred grand on a videogame," says Jarvis, who had decided he wanted to make videogames rather than pinball tables after playing *Space Invaders*. Jarvis soon found himself charged with developing Williams' comeback game. The game designer had clear ideas about what he wanted to do. He wanted to make what he called "sperm games" – videogames that bristled with testosterone, stimulated adrenal glands, and would terrify and thrill in equal measure. He sought to make *Defender* the embodiment of his vision. "The inspiration for *Defender* was to somehow capture the physical rush and freedom of flying in a 2D game and throw in a believable world with cool enemies," says Jarvis. "And then, most importantly, give the player a real purpose – something to defend. The idea of defence as opposed to offence is so much more emotional. Protecting something precious from attack is much more visceral than randomly raping and pillaging aliens."

Defender was a high-speed race to destroy waves of alien attackers who were determined to capture the humans, spread across the game's horizontally-scrolling game world. Captured humans would be lifted into the skies and used to turn weak aliens into fast, angry, laser-spitting mutants that would seek out the player. As a result, it was in players' self-interest to stop the aliens from capturing humans. Jarvis completed *Defender* just hours before its debut at the October 1980 Amusement and Music Operators Association trade show in Chicago – the highlight of the US arcade industry's calendar. Williams' return to the videogame business was a big deal, and the industry was keen to see what the company had come up with. Jarvis and the team were nervous: "None of us really had a clue whether the game was any good or not. Everything was so new at that time." *Defender*'s macho swagger proved too much for the trade show delegates. The sight of the game's controls – a joystick and five buttons at a time when one or two buttons were standard – scared off numerous delegates. Those who dared to step up to the daunting control panel found themselves beaten to a pulp within seconds of pressing the start button. "The show-goers were old shiny-suit guys and blonde spokes-models," says Jarvis. "They didn't know a videogame from a TV set. They played for ten seconds and died." The delegates dismissed *Defender* as a failure. It was too hard and too complex to be a hit, they agreed. So they consigned it to their lists of no-hope games, the titles the industry expected to flop. Another game on that year's list was Namco's *Pac-Man*, the feminine yin to *Defender*'s masculine yang.

Toru Iwatani, *Pac-Man*'s designer, had set out to challenge the status quo of the arcades with his maze game. "Most arcade videogames of the time were violent and focused on the male player, so the game centres became places frequented mainly by men," he says. "We decided to change that demographic by designing games that could appeal to women and thus to couples, therefore making game centres desirable places to go on a date." After giving it some thought, Iwatani decided his game should be about eating. "When I imagined what women enjoy, the image of them eating cakes and desserts came to mind so I used 'eating' as a keyword," he says. "When I was doing research with this keyword I came across the image of a pizza with a slice taken out of it and had that eureka moment. So I based the Pac-Man character design on that shape." For the look of the characters in his maze game Iwatani drew on the Japanese kawaii art style he had already used in the *Pong*-influenced *Cutie Q*. The cute, kitsch characters of kawaii originated in the art of early manga comics and anime films, but really took off in 1974 when the fashion accessories company Sanrio launched its Hello Kitty range aimed primarily, but not exclusively, at teenage girls. Kawaii characters resonated culturally with the Japanese so much that, by the dawn of the 1980s, the interest was growing rather than fading. Kawaii became so integrated into Japanese culture that kawaii characters can be found on everything from government posters and bank literature to computers and cooking pans. For Iwatani, kawaii visuals had two advantages: "The hardware specifications at the time, compared to the present time, were very limited, so we could only have very simplistic artwork and it was very difficult to create a sense of empathy for the player with this limited artistic style. But we wanted as many people as possible to enjoy the game, so by creating kawaii characters we thought we could appeal to women as well."

Iwatani's ideas resulted in a maze chase game where the player, as Pac-Man, has to eat all the dots in the maze while dodging four cute ghosts. Pac-Man's only defence was four power pills located in the far corners of the maze. If eaten, these pills allowed Pac-Man to eat the ghosts for a limited period of time, turning the player from pursued to pursuer. It was a simple but elegant game lifted by its charming kawaii looks. But few thought it would be popular. Namco doubted its potential. Namco's US distributor Bally Midway believed no one wanted to play maze games. The delegates at the Chicago trade show agreed. Instead they reckoned the hit in waiting was Namco's other offering *Rally-X*, a colour game where players had to drive a car around a maze spread over several screens to collect flags while being chased by other cars. "Unlike the other exciting games that were around at the time, *Pac-Man* was designed for people to play with ease and when relaxed without 'excitement'," says Iwatani. "So when it was launched we didn't get the kind of review that other games got. I guess *Pac-Man* didn't have the 'sensational' image. I myself could not imagine that it would be loved by so many people and be such an international hit."

"PAC-MAN BROUGHT THE FEMALE AUDIENCE INTO THE ARCADE AND MADE THE AMOUNT OF INCOME SO GREAT THAT BUSINESSMEN STARTED OPENING UP ARCADES AND, THEREBY, MAKING GAMES AVAILABLE IN MORE PLACES"

The industry veterans at the trade show were, however, wrong. Very wrong. *Defender* became a huge success as players sought to master the game in the hope of gaining kudos from conquering the most vicious game in the arcade. "Kids used to steal rare silver collectible quarters from their parents' coin collections, which were worth ten to 100 times a regular quarter, to stick into *Defender*," says Jarvis. "The average *Defender* cabinet in the US would take in about 2,500 quarters a week. Since there were 60,000 *Defender* games out there, you would have up to 150 million quarters in the games every week. That is a lot of quarters." But even *Defender*'s success paled before the commercial juggernaut that was *Pac-Man*. For Twin Galaxies' Day, *Pac-Man* was the moment when the already rapid growth of arcades went into overdrive: "When *Pac-Man* came on the scene, it brought the female audience into the arcade and made the amount of income so great that businessmen started opening up arcades and, thereby, making games available in more places." *Pac-Man*'s cute kawaii characters were also ideal for

merchandising and soon the pizza-inspired hero and the ghosts of Iwatani's mega-hit game started appearing everywhere. ABC-TV started showing a Pac-Man cartoon series that attracted 20 million viewers on its first broadcast. Pac-Man turned up on lunchboxes, Frisbees, stickers, yo-yos, sleeping bags and 'I brake for Pac-Man' bumper stickers. Pac-Man even scaled the heights of the pop charts thanks to **Jerry Buckner** and Gary Garcia, a song-writing duo from Arkon, Ohio. The pair discovered *Pac-Man* at their local bar. "We were drawn to the videogame craze like everyone at that time and played most of the games," recalls Buckner. "There was a bar near a recording studio we worked at with a *Pac-Man* machine that we played every chance we got. At some point the idea for the song sprang up." Big record labels initially rejected their Pac-Man Fever song, but after Buckner and Garcia released it locally and sold 12,000 copies in a week, CBS quickly offered them a deal. CBS re-released Pac-Man Fever in December 1981, the following March it hit number nine in the Billboard Hot 100 chart selling more than a million copies in the process. CBS pushed Buckner and Garcia to make a whole album of songs about videogames as quickly as possible to capitalise the success of their novelty single. "With only three weeks to complete the album we would go to a game room and look for a game that was hot and have the good players explain how to play it," says Garcia. "We would then go home and write the music for it and by the next day be laying the basic tracks for the song." The result of those rushed sessions was the Pac-Man Fever album: a saccharine snapshot of arcade life in early 1982.

Its eight tracks of sugary melodies name-checked some of the biggest games of the time from Sega's traffic dodging *Frogger* ('Froggy's Lament') to *Centipede*, a shoot 'em up set amid the mushroom-strewn detritus of a forest that was created by former General Motors employee Bailey and *Asteroids* designer Logg ('Ode To Centipede'). Buckner and Garcia's lyrics captured a world of pockets brimming with quarters, intergalactic battles and calloused fingers. Sound effects taken from the games punctuated the tracks with blasts of white noise, eldritch beeps and the robotic monotone of synthesised speech. The album sold nearly a million copies and made Buckner and Garcia stars of the videogame boom. They appeared on TV shows such as the Dick Clark-presented show American Bandstand and a special Pac-Man Fever day on MTV, an exciting new TV channel dedicated to music videos that had started broadcasting in August 1981.

Buckner and Garcia weren't the only people sharing in the success of *Pac-Man*. Atari, more by fluke than design, had found itself the holder of the exclusive rights to make *Pac-Man* on home consoles and computers thanks to a $1 million deal signed in 1978 when Namco had no hit games to its name. Atari couldn't believe its luck. For a relative pittance the company had gained control of the biggest game of the past decade. In April 1982, *Pac-Man* arrived on the Atari 2600, sending sales of the console through the roof. More than 12 million *Pac-Man* cartridges sold worldwide. "*Pac-Man* was our all-time best seller. It was a phenomenon," says **Ray Kassar**, then Atari president. And with Namco owed no more than 50 cents from each of the $25 cartridges, most of the profit ended up in Atari's coffers. The *Pac-Man* cartridge confirmed the 2600's utter dominance of the home games market. The 2600's lead over its nearest rival, the Mattel Intellivision, was now approaching 20 million units. Atari had pretty much stopped worrying about rival consoles, and was now more concerned about the videogame companies that had started releasing 2600 games to cash in on the captive audience Atari had built up with its console.

"WITH ONLY THREE WEEKS TO COMPLETE THE ALBUM WE WOULD GO TO A GAME ROOM AND LOOK FOR A HOT GAME AND HAVE THE GOOD PLAYERS EXPLAIN HOW TO PLAY IT. WE WOULD THEN GO HOME AND WRITE MUSIC"

The challenge to Atari's control of the games released on its console started with a memo innocently sent by the company's product marketing group to the game developers in the home console division. The memo detailed the sales figures for 2600 game cartridges and was meant to help the team understand what types of videogame were most popular. But instead of inspiring more successful products, it sparked a rebellion. The hackles of the division's game developers were already up when the memo landed on their desks. "The frustration began when Atari refused to pay a bonus program that was believed to be in place," says **David Crane**, the programmer who had converted Atari's bomb-dropping arcade game *Canyon Bomber* to the 2600. "Our department manager had negotiated a small royalty based on unit sales and when he later asked about that, he was asked: 'What royalty?' To stop the grumbling, managers went through and gave raises to key employees, but a line had been crossed." The product marketing group's memo reopened the royalties issue. "The memo was a one-page list of the top 20 selling cartridges from the previous year, with their per cent of sales. The purpose of the memo was the hint: 'These type of games are selling best… do more like these'. But this memo also showed us whose games did well, not just the game type. We noticed that four of the designers in a department of 30 were responsible for over 60 per cent of sales. And since we knew that Atari's cartridge sales for the prior year was $100 million, it was a shock to know that four guys making $30,000 per year made the company $60 million."

The four in question – Crane, Larry Kaplan, Alan Miller and Bob Whitehead – decided enough was enough and took the matter straight to Kassar. Miller put together a revised contract to present to Kassar, based on the kind of deals record labels gave their artists. "The four of us took this little sales statistic up to Kassar," says Crane. "Our point was that the statistics showed we must be doing something better than others. Since a game is a creative product, it is possible that one person is more creative than another and, therefore, should be compensated accordingly. We were told that 'you are no more important to Atari than the guy on the assembly line who puts them together – without him we have no sales either'."

Furious at Kassar's dismissal of their arguments, the four quit Atari a few days later. With help from former music industry executive Jim Levy and $750,000 of venture capital investment the four rebels formed Activision, a company that would create and publish games for the 2600. It was a bold step. Until that moment only the manufacturers of videogame consoles released the games. Indeed, Atari never even thought anyone else would make games for the 2600 and so had created nothing within the console that could prevent it. Activision's founders had declared war on their former employer and set out to smash Atari's monopoly on 2600 games. When Activision went public with its plans, Atari sued, hoping to maintain its iron grip on the lucrative pool of 2600 owners it had spent millions cultivating. Atari's legal challenge backfired. The court backed Activision and ruled that Atari had no right to stop others developing games for the 2600. In July 1980 Activision's first three games – Crane's *Fishing Derby* and *Dragster* plus Whitehead's *Boxing* – reached the shelves packaged in distinctive boxes that prominently displayed the names of their creators.

Activision's public promotion of each game's creator addressed one of the main complaints of Atari's programmers about their employer: the policy of keeping their names out of the public eye. "The fear was either that another company would try to steal them away or that the engineers would get an inflated sense of their worth and start making outrageous demands," says Delman, co-creator of *Lunar Lander*. The reasoning may have made sense to Atari's management, but it angered its game developers who were starting to see themselves as the artistic pioneers of a new form of entertainment. The policy would prompt another of the company's leading VCS 2600 developers to resign in late 1979. **Warren Robinett** joined Atari in 1977 after completing a masters degree in computer science.

After completing *Slot Racers*, a car-themed remake of *Combat*, Robinett was searching around for an idea for his next game when he encountered Don Woods and Will Crowther's text game *Adventure*. "I played *Adventure* at the Stanford Artificial Intelligence Lab in early 1978. My housemate Julius Smith was a grad student at Stanford and he took me up there," says Robinett. "Crowther and Woods' game took the nerd world by storm in 1978. I was just finishing *Slot Racers* then and needed to come up with an idea for my next game. The idea of exploration

through a network of rooms, with useful objects you could find and bring with you and obstacles to get past, and monsters to fight – I thought this could work as a console game."

The 2600's limited capabilities and lack of a keyboard ruled out a direct remake of the text game, so Robinett reworked the ideas into visual form. The turns-and-text original was transformed into an action game where players ran around the screen dodging and fighting monsters and finding objects to allow them to access new areas as they searched for an enchanted chalice. Officially there were 29 rooms in Robinett's *Adventure*, but, unknown to his colleagues, there were actually 30. The secret room was Robinett's protest against Atari's attempts to hide away its game creators. "Atari was keeping us game designers anonymous, which I found irritating," he says.

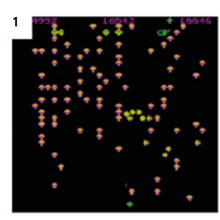
To access the 30th room, players had to discover a hidden dot and use it in the right place to open an invisible doorway. Inside awaited the flashing words: 'Created by Warren Robinett'. "Atari had the power to keep my name off the box, but I had the power to put it on screen," he explains. *Adventure*'s concealed message was one of the earliest 'Easter eggs' – a hidden secret within a videogame for players who search carefully enough to discover. Such secrets have since become a standard part of videogames. Robinett was proud of his game. During its development, Atari's management felt he was being too ambitious and tried to stop him working on it. Halfway through its development, his boss told him to turn it into a game to tie in with Warner's 1978 Superman film. His colleague John Dunn stepped in and used a copy of the half-finished game to create the Superman game, so that Robinett could finish his. When *Adventure* eventually came out in late 1979, it became a big success selling more than a million copies worldwide. Robinett, however, had already quit by the time it came out: "I thought I had done a pretty good job in creating the *Adventure* cartridge and did not get the slightest bit of positive feedback when I completed it. My boss initially thought it was impossible to do and told me not to do it; when I went and did it anyway, he did not see this as a good thing. He told me I was 'hard to direct'. When I told him I was quitting, he smiled. I guess I forgot to tell him that I had my name hidden in the final game code for *Adventure* that I had handed over to him." Robinett went on to join educational software publisher The Learning Company, where in 1982 he would create *Rocky's Boots*, one of the first successful educational games that taught Boolean logic using a puzzle game format.

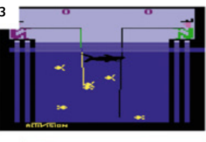
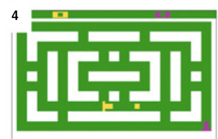
Activision's decision to muscle in on Atari's console audience was well timed. Atari had released its *Space Invaders* cartridge a few months before the first Activision games arrived, causing 2600 sales to rocket. Activision's clever marketing coupled with high-quality games such as the bomb-catching action of *Kaboom!* and the jungle adventure *Pitfall!* soon gouged out a sizeable share of the multi-million dollar 2600 game cartridge market. In 1981 Activision had achieved sales of $6.3 million; in 1982 this soared to $66 million. The public profile of their developers soared in tandem with sales, leaving the company snowed under by thousands of fanmail letters every week. "Publicising our names provided all of the positives of celebrity and none of the negatives," says Crane. "I was never chased by the paparazzi but, in certain circles, there was pretty good name recognition. But the real thrill is hearing directly from a game player that your work touched them in some way. Because there was a name and a face behind the game, players were able to let me know directly how much they enjoyed playing my games." Other Atari employees took note of Activision's success. Coin-op developers Howard Delman, Ed Rotberg and Roger Hector quit to form Videa in 1981 to make games for Atari and other arcade companies. "There was a lot of money being made in the industry, but the fraction coming to the engineers was small relative to the profits," explains Delman. "It occurred to some of us that being a contractor to Atari, or any game company for that matter, could be far more lucrative than being an employee."

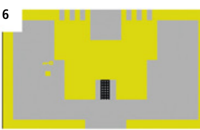
That same year another group of employees from the home console division decided to follow Activision's example. Backed with $2 million of venture capital, they founded Imagic on July 17 1981 with the goal of publishing games for the 2600. Among the Imagic team was **Rob Fulop**, the author of the 2600 version of *Space Invaders*: "We were authors and we didn't feel like authors at all. We weren't compensated based on how good our work was perceived; our name wasn't on the game. So we left. I wasn't involved in getting the funding for Imagic; someone else did that and invited me to the party. It took me about two seconds to say yeah."

Imagic's debut game, Fulop's *Galaxian*-inspired *Demon Attack*, became one of the best-selling 2600 games of 1982. **Manny Gerard**, the Warner executive responsible for overseeing Atari, felt the exodus of talent at that time was inevitable: "Entrepreneurial guys go off and that's exactly what happened," he says. "Guys see a way to make money and they run off and they build companies. Atari was getting bigger and it was not as entrepreneurial as it was. It happens. It's the natural evolution of things." But Activision didn't just inspire Atari employees to walk. It also encouraged companies unconnected to Atari to start releasing 2600 games, creating new rivals such as Quaker Oats' US games division, Xonox and Fox Video Games.

Atari may have resented the companies seeking to grab a slice of what it regarded as its market, but their existence did little to damage the video game giant's income. By 1982 Atari had become the single biggest business in the Warner Communications conglomerate. It had spent $75 million promoting its products in 1982, more than Coca-Cola and McDonald's. Its sales were more than five times that of Warner's film and music businesses and 70 per cent of Warner's profits came from Atari. As a consequence Warner's share price ballooned from just under $5 a share in 1976 to $63 in 1982. "We made more money than god," says **Noah Anglin**, a manager in Atari's coin-op division. "We made more money than Warner's movie division. We went from being a mention in their corporate magazine to where we *were* their corporate magazine." And with cinema ticket and record sales being hit as teenagers swapped vinyl and the silver screen for the electronic thrills of the arcade, the videogame looked unstoppable. In the 48 months since *Space Invaders*' release, the videogame had conquered North America. Its relentless ascent marked the biggest revolution in entertainment since the arrival of the TV set. And then, suddenly, everything fell apart…

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1. Ed Logg and Dona Bailey's *Centipede* from 1980. 2. 1978's *Canyon Bomber*, designed by Howard Delman. 3. *Fishing Derby*'s shark-infested lake courtesy of David Crane. 4. Warren Robinett's *Slot Racers*. 5. The original *Adventure* text game. 6. Robinett's *Adventure* on the Atari 2600, home of the first gaming Easter egg. 7. Activision's *Kaboom!* from 1981. 8. *Pitfall*, which arrived on the Atari 2600 in 1982 and went on to sell more than four million copies

Review

New games assessed in words and numbers

Edge's most played

Alan Wake



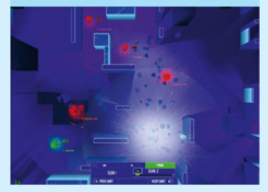
It's not that scary, but it's still a perfect blend of The Twilight Zone, Twin Peaks and Stephen King. Plus, you can send absolute evil packing with a flare gun shot to the face.
360, MICROSOFT

Blur



We've been tearing up online one track at a time, crawling up the ranks and forcing our way through the pack. Have a shunt up your pipe and a barge as we nitro past.
360, PS3, BIZARRE CREATIONS

Frozen Synapse



What do you mean, there's no way we would have known your entire team would be killed when we blindly fired a rocket into that room? It's, like, psychology, yeah?
PC, MODE 7

A tale of two cities

Is emergence a friend or foe to narrative?



Three's against a crowd: what happens between players when they're given the right tools is often unpredictable, though it nearly always involves explosions, pratfalls, and a distinct lack of tragic dialogue

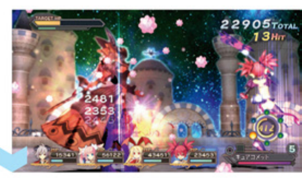
What's the perfect solution of ink and blood? When does the stricture of a scripted story need to give way to a group of players doing what they do best, and launching a car off a rooftop? The original *Crackdown* treated story as a shell for its progression ladder, one easily broken by the ambitions of impatient players: in line with most recent open-world games, its story was forgettable, but had the grace to leave you alone as you poked and prodded the world and its toys.

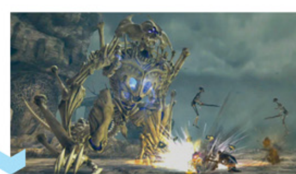
Narrative and action should be interlaced and symbiotic. Should be. And the relationship between story and action, telling and doing, is reaching a fork for our online industry. Realtime Worlds is at the forefront of this split, both with its own MMOG *APB* (look to edge-online.com for a review soon) and breakaway studio Ruffian's continuation of *Crackdown*.

The most interesting aspect of *Crackdown 2* is how multiplayer has been incorporated, the city now a giant playground for the emergent narratives that gangs of players make inevitable. In other words, multiplayer isn't just here to stay in its own right, but is directly influencing the design of formerly singleplayer experiences. Look at the JRPG: *Dragon Quest IX* is a bold step for a seminal series, where even 'minor' online features have a huge impact on the design. Introducing a wealth of character customisation, for example, drastically affects your visual point of reference for the hero's journey, not to mention the specificity of the narrative, but is central to the new design at *DQ*'s heart. Drop in/out play and communal quests are integral to the game, but also erode certain hallmarks of the previous singleplayer entries.

Stories in games may be in no immediate danger – the recent success of *Alan Wake* and *Heavy Rain* indicate a demand for narrative-led experiences – but there's no longer an expectation that they should exist. The lure of player-centric virtual spaces must be obvious to developers, while the subscriptions and microtransactions possible therein take care of the publishing interest. In the first age of online, games like *Crackdown 2* are the litmus test for the stories of the future – testing the line between literary distinction and distraction before (whisper it) wondering how important it is to define it for players at all.









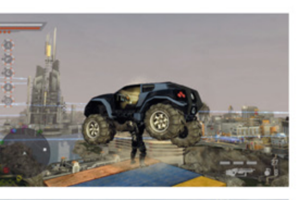


Edge's scoring system explained:
1 = one, 2 = two, 3 = three,
4 = four, 5 = five, 6 = six, 7 = seven,
8 = eight, 9 = nine, 10 = ten



CRACKDOWN 2

FORMAT: 360 RELEASE: OUT NOW
PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT DEVELOPER: RUFFIAN GAMES
PREVIOUSLY IN: E204, E209





Driving is the easiest skill to acquire. Freak aggression is dynamic, and running them over results in a skidpan bloodbath

Sticky feet. Before the mighty fourplayer co-op, feral hordes and almighty explosions, that's what strikes you about the welcome return of *Crackdown*. Faced with a near-vertical surface, so sheer as to stretch the poor texture around it, they do what almost no other 'free-roaming' feet can do: they manage to find traction, just for a second, so you can reach your destination.

That could be a shortcut that makes a mission too easy, or makes dozens of square feet of level design seem pointless. The game doesn't care. You bought it, you own it. The action game laureate has returned, and it's almost better than ever.

The plot, as much as there is one, remains the same. In Pacific City, a metropolis made of ledges and paranoia, a nation of freaks and hoodlums is on a suicide mission against you, a genetically engineered super-cop. With supreme strength, agility and firepower – enough to leap up buildings, throw cars across bridges and clean up the streets with single grenades – you view this world the way a child views its toys. A father figure, the endlessly patient, always creepy and entirely hilarious Voice Of The Agency, struggles to make best use of you. Obliterating civilians is, after all, terrible PR; murdering your fellow agents is expensive.



***Crackdown 2* is what you might call a passive aggressive or, as Ruffian has it, 'tooling around' game. Line up a monster custom soundtrack (and preferably a trio of online agents) and the hours fly by, even when the campaign is completed**

Behind this fascist exterior lies the most liberal of videogames. Though the sandbox Keys To The City mode has been left for its first DLC, *Crackdown 2* is even more open than before. To a fault, in fact, as we'll explain in a moment. Redesigned as a free-flowing torrent of action suited to four online players, any of whom can drop in and out of the game without disruption, the bulk of its campaign involves a dynamic fight for territory. Rather than kingpins and bodyguards, the main objectives this time are the warrens of mutant Freaks that you have to infiltrate and purge.

We'll put our necks out here and guess that someone behind *Crackdown* is a massive fan of the Blade movies. First it was harpoon guns, rooftop hurdling and a vigilante mix of firepower and kung-fu. Now it's even more obvious. A mutual enemy of the Agents and gangs, the Freaks come out at night to feast on terrified citizens, but turn into paste when bombed with UV light. Project Sunburst, a genocide weapon



Point machine guns at a petrol tank and an entire street will lift above the shockwave, barrels, bodies and canisters escaping like fireworks



Cell leader Catalina Thorne knows a few things the Agency would rather she didn't. The truth is out there in audio logs left by her and a network of whistleblowers, Freak-watchers and news reporters





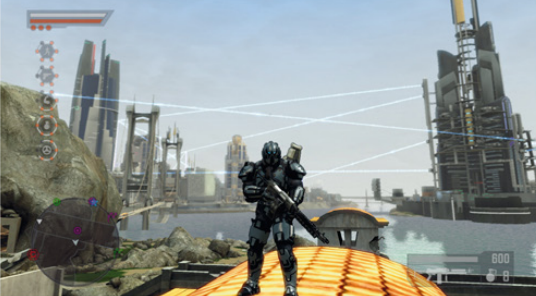
hijacked by a gang named Cell, must be reclaimed and deployed one generator at a time. Restore a district's power, firing a web of lasers to the central Agency Tower, before dropping a 'beacon' into the local Freak lair and protecting it until it's charged.

Secondary objectives are manifold, and bring to mind the turf battles of *Prototype*. Cell divisions have occupied tactical locations across the city, and emerging Freak breaches must be closed. Those iconic collectible orbs, meanwhile, goad you from the highest, farthest and toughest reaches of the terrain. 'Rogue orbs', ingenious new additions that don't sit around when spotted, lead you on merry dances that require new, lateral approaches. Live orbs encourage co-op play, and returning stunt markers and hidden orbs take hours – days – to earn and collect.

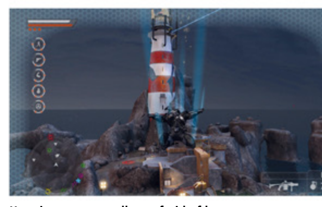




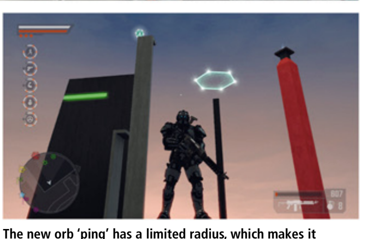








Here is a game totally unafraid of how you choose to play it – so much so that its premium unlocks, the Flysuit and helicopter, break the most important of its laws: gravity. By this point in the game, though, the transformation is appreciated



The new orb 'ping' has a limited radius, which makes it difficult to exploit. It also takes a few seconds to recharge and deliberately holds back altitude info. There are also hidden and rogue orbs, which provide an extra challenge

There are, in other words, plenty more toys in the box. And, just as before, most of them are orgasmic instruments of chemical warfare. Rather than just explode, rockets and grenades suck in all the physics around them and belch it out as fire, sounding across the city. Machine guns, which you can lock and focus on specific body parts, turn targets into glistening puffs of power-ups. Point them at a petrol tank and an entire street will lift above the shockwave, barrels, bodies and canisters escaping like fireworks. Sticking, homing, bouncing, whizzing, screwing, skewering and bullying, every item of ordnance has its own personality.

Raised to the power of four-way co-op, the potential for fun is extraordinary. The chief catalyst is the magnet grenade, a marvellous troublemaker that sticks any physicalised item – almost anything in this game – to another one. So, with a mischievous mind and nimble pair of hands, you could turn a car into a wrecking ball suspended from the new Agency helicopter. One chum could hang from the latter while another sits in the former, none expecting the wrong move that might accidentally flick the car high into the air and drop it on the chopper's rotor blades, annihilating all concerned for an unintended Achievement (see 'Urban achievers').

The air in this new, dilapidated Pacific is thick with all the volatile ingredients of giggle fits, hearty roars and triumphant cheers. In multiplayer, especially, it's hard to move without setting one of them off. The price, though – here it comes – is that the first game's hugely rewarding mission structure has been sacrificed but for a few closing stages. The action is constant but rarely focused, even when funnelled into giant caves full of Freaks in all their forms. Those giant, beautifully constructed venues have lost that anatomical quality where you sneak in through pores, conquer the antibodies, disable the organs and assassinate the brain.

Furthermore, the arrival of true, apocalyptic chaos to the streets has destroyed much of their character. Fun as it is to see the proud landmarks ruined, ironically reborn as more complex climbing frames, there's a pall across the districts that makes



Reduced to rubble in the wake of the Freak virus outbreak, the Agency Tower returns bigger and better throughout the campaign, each reactivated generator adding further floors. Thanks to a smart FOV stretch, jumping from the roof is a lesson in bowel control

them all feel the same. Not even a new soundtrack 'system', where Cell vehicles and ghetto blasters spread music like propaganda, sunrise welcomed with a divine, Philip Glass-inspired jingle, can resuscitate it.

Necessary or not, it's an impulse that undermines Ruffian's first: to leave the basics of *Crackdown* intact. At its best, this is more than just the purest, most narcotic action game in the world – it's a cultural pinnacle. Every superhero, be it in comic books or the movies they've inspired, wishes they could visit its playground. **[8]**

Urban achievers



Believer. Evangelist. Master. *Crackdown*'s use of Achievements has only improved in its sequel. Some are more obvious than others. Some take ages and require tireless searching, while others happen by accidents that are, in this riotous environment, their own reward. All are now announced by the returning Voice Of The Agency, Michael McConnohie. What's great about his performance, a delicious send-up of privatised justice and fascist urban renewal, is that it's part of a colossal body of work and yet beguilingly unique. Many of his lines are repeated, but never to the point of spoiling them. One of our favourites, as he fumes at the loss of a beacon he'll have to replace: "Try again when you've grown a pair!"



DRAGON QUEST IX: SENTINELS OF THE STARRY SKIES

FORMAT: DS **RELEASE:** OUT NOW **PUBLISHER:** SQUARE ENIX
DEVELOPER: LEVEL-5 **PREVIOUSLY IN:** E199



The main story concerns the lost fruit of Yggdrasil the world tree (above) which need to be collected and returned to restore equilibrium to the heavens





Dragon Quest may have essentially defined the JRPG, but that was in 1986. Since then, for all the series' huge popularity in Japan, it has idled behind the pack. Simple battle design and behind-the-curve graphics (until *VIII*) put the vast majority of *Dragon Quest*'s success down to its touching, character-driven stories. The ninth instalment is about making amends.

It's all down to *IX*'s move to DS, a decision that has seen it embrace cooperative multiplayer, which has affected every aspect of the game. The multiplayer is assured and flexible, working in a similar manner to an MMOG, in that the four players can roam the host's world independently. If a teammate gets into a scrap, those close by are automatically sucked in too – others may join later, if they wish. The play mirrors that of the singleplayer game exactly, with each player selecting their moves at the beginning of a round of attacks.

Since your character is effectively public, you can now do a lot more to customise it than in previous games. Nearly 1,000 weapons, armour and items are available to equip, while you get to choose your hero's appearance from a limited set of options at the start of the game. That customisability, and the fact that your offline party is made up of anonymous quest-mates whom you can switch in and out at will, means that the story has nothing of the grand, character-driven sweep of previous games.

In fact, it's rather simplistic. The hero, a guardian angel of a small village, falls from heaven during a strange celestial quake. By travelling the world and solving problems found in each location, the hero must restore both his wings and order in heaven. In effect, then, the main questline is essentially a string of mini stories. There's one about a town plagued by a strange, fatal disease which you must convince an obsessive scientist to cure. There's one about a selfish queen and her lovestruck lizard, and another about a school haunted by a ghost which makes badly behaved pupils disappear.







One of *Dragon Quest IX*'s only technical faults is a juddering framerate once you have a full party. It's particularly heavy in towns but will often beset your travels outside them, apparently at random locations



> There's a quest about a queen and her lovestruck lizard, and another about a school haunted by a ghost which makes badly behaved pupils disappear

The stories boast the wide range of emotional notes that typify the series, but they're so short and sketchily drawn that you're often asked to sympathise with characters before you've come to know them, and move on before you've had the chance to value them. The traditional clothes of the RPG, meanwhile – the dungeon with a boss at its end – often render the tales, for all the playful imagination in their invention, somewhat formulaic in their telling. The translation is stellar, though, its dialogue snappy, witty and charming, with puns and in-jokes coming thick and fast. If item acquisition and levelling provide habitual impetus for playing, the dialogue provides the intellectual one.

The multiplayer's greatest achievement is its subtle interplay with the singleplayer game. Nothing in the solo adventure is out of reach if you don't have friends to play with; nothing in the multiplayer game obscures what you enjoy about the singleplayer game. With players able to act independently of each other, you can choose to explore the world together in order to find rare and valuable items for the alchemy pot, or alone, knowing that friends are around if you need them.

It helps, too, that with the removal of random encounters, exploration is a lot more enjoyable than in previous *Dragon Quest* games. Being able to anticipate your foes engenders a confidence that means you're more fearless in stepping forth – and with caches of items to be found in specific areas and standalone, almost *WOW*-style, quests to be completed, there's more reason to do so than in previous games. You'll still be





It's hard to know what impact it'll have in the less densely inhabited west, but we hope tag mode, in which you leave the system on while it searches for others, proves successful as a way of winning new maps and seeing other players' stats



IX's longevity is founded in acquiring and beating its treasure maps – activate the map and a randomly generated dungeon with a boss will appear



frequently battling, though. Many monsters will give chase if you pass too close, and they always catch up; others you'll crash into because you're not looking where you're going. Besides, every time you encounter a new monster you'll pick a fight just to see what it looks like. *IX*'s monster design may lack *VIII*'s still-mesmerising clarity, but it's just as rich in personality and humour.

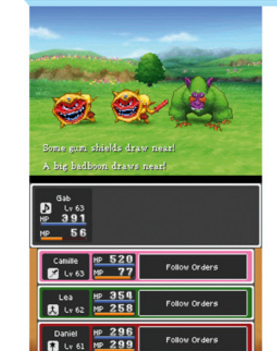
The one problem with battles is the fact that you never precisely know in which order characters will attack. It's therefore hard to strategise as a party to take advantage of the attack combo system, in which successive successful weapon hits rack up a damage bonus, or ensure a healer will save a character before the enemy has a chance to finish them off.

There is great reinvention in *IX*, but Level-5 has not completely reworked some of the series' many idiosyncratic features. Though menu systems still manage everything other than navigation of the world, they're subtly but superbly designed so that they rarely require confirmation or extraneous button presses. Smooth and fast, there's little friction to your decision-making. Less effective, perplexingly, is *IX*'s infrastructure for stat comparisons. Though many items possess multiple stat boost types, the game won't tell you what you'll lose by equipping a new piece in favour of highlighting what you'll gain, so you'll often forget that you'd been concentrating on evade when a gleaming new pair of boots with great defence turns up.

Fundamentally, though, *IX* seems to perform effortlessly what must have been a demanding balancing act. It preserves almost all that has made *Dragon Quest* such a success – its battling and bestiary, its menus and manner – while achieving a form of multiplayer which surpasses anything ever attempted on DS before. Huge in scope and strong on detail, *IX* has ironed out the kinks that have made the series less palatable outside Japan, and with Nintendo's support, *IX* is sure to have the wider impact that the series has craved. In providing an adventure as deep and enduringly absorbing as this, it thoroughly deserves such success. **[9]**

Honing heroes





The great majority of your time in *IX* will be spent crafting your hero, and entourage, using the class system. On levelling up you have the opportunity to spend points on class-specific stat boosts, spells and skills. Once you visit Alltrades Abbey you can choose a new class, sending your character back to level one but retaining all boosts, spells and skills and opening up a set of super-classes which possess particularly powerful talents. Supporting this is an alchemy system, through which you can combine items found as drops from monsters or in the field to create new items. You'll need recipes first, though.



NPCs dotted around the world will give you quests to complete that are rewarded with items, some fetch-based, others more challenging, such as performing a war cry on a werewolf immediately before killing it



TRANSFORMERS: WAR FOR CYBERTRON

FORMAT: 360 (VERSION TESTED), PC, PS3 RELEASE: OUT NOW
PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION DEVELOPER: HIGH MOON STUDIOS

Robot snores



With the chance to upgrade your war machine between battles, and free from AI pathfinding problems, multiplayer feels like a missed opportunity: the monotonous environments make matches feel like a shooting gallery, and are a further reminder of how sorely missed a wall-stick is. Imagine a shoulder cam in *Unreal Tournament* and you're partway toward its restrictive, frustrating nature. Classes are customisable, though they fit into a selection of *Battlefield*-esque roles, and Escalation mode is a variation on Horde, wherein wave after wave must be suppressed to garner the points to either access new areas or upgrades. Borrowing from the best may be a fine idea but, without the same level of polish, rust sets in.

The Transformers may be hardwired for mimicry, but trying to emulate Marcus and Dom feels like a push too far. It's not an unrecognisable likeness, though – and developer High Moon has clearly thought long and hard about how to make the series fit such a template. What's far more of a problem than the lack of originality is what's left out, and the shonkiness of the remainder. Bugs – from clipping to the odd progression blocker – are the least of your worries when you're denied a roadie-run and wall-stick (though the AIs seem to have mastered the art).

Stand-up combat is heralded on nearly every occasion by a laser barrage smashing into your squad of three, which if you're facing the wrong way can be instant doom. Weapons, carried two at a time, are the usual mix and do the usual jobs. It'd be nice to see bits falling off a Transformer when you shoot it, but this is the 'X bullets until dead' school of feedback – apart from the headshots, which produce lovely sparks. It's a shame to see melee limited, too, when compared to the cutscene fisticuffs. *War For Cybertron* has its moments, most of which see you boosting from above and transforming to deliver a flying boot to the face, but the remainder feels mediocre.

That also goes for the transforming: it should dramatically change the game, but often just feels like a secondary weapon. The game struggles to find a purpose for vehicles beyond A-to-B shepherding, and while there's a joy in your metal carapace twisting into a new shape mid-battle, it's let down by the payoff of underpowered weapons and underwhelming handling. The jets are OK, thanks mainly to vertical levels being built around their abilities, but surely Optimus Prime should be more than a trundling Tonka toy. There's rarely a sense of weight to the vehicles, even during a mile-high free-fall (unlike Atari's PS2 Transformers title), and you don't get any sense of power from them.

One triumph is Cybertron. It's a Herculean homeworld of crumbling statues and pillars. At its best, there are moments of awe, too regularly interrupted by the repetitive demands of switch-pressing objectives and bland bosses.

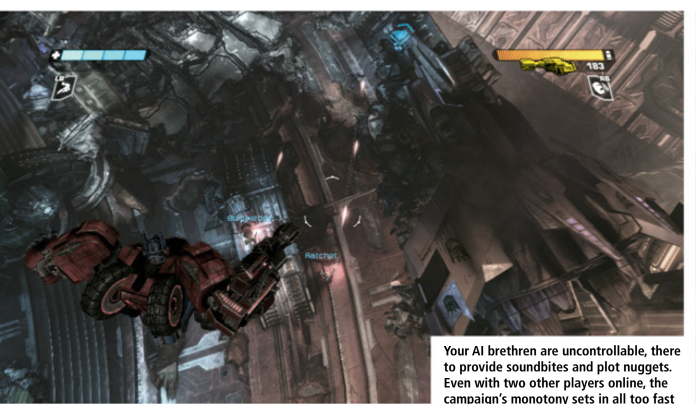
The game isn't totally uninspired: its campaign is structured well, multiplayer might have worked if it didn't always descend into chaos, and there's even a Horde mode (which suffers from the lack of a cover button). From your first childish grin at the metal-morphing sound effect to the credits is a short journey, and it's much duller than the surface sheen. This is a whisper of what the IP has to offer videogames rather than a realisation, and there's no disguise in the universe that can hide that. **[5]**



Turret sections provide minor relief from the campaign grind and add some extra firepower to take on the bigger tin men that block your path to robot liberty



One of the highlights of the game involves the Autobots' capture, providing a rare moment of restraint amid the multitude of overwhelming and confusing battles that make up most of the singleplayer campaign chapters



Your AI brethren are uncontrollable, there to provide soundbites and plot nuggets. Even with two other players online, the campaign's monotony sets in all too fast



The scale is suitably epic, helped by the Unreal technology under the hood but also exemplified by well-timed scenery-smashing set-pieces



The use of the Action Point system in combat, where different moves have different associated costs, is ingenious. The ability to save AP for your character's following turn allows a level of strategy few JRPGs afford

TRINITY UNIVERSE

FORMAT: PS3 **RELEASE:** OUT NOW **PUBLISHER:** NIPPON ICHI
DEVELOPER: NIPPON ICHI/GUST/IDEA FACTORY

A few hours into *Trinity Universe*, after yet another tutorial explaining a new tiny cog in the intricate machinery that underpins the game, your tutor offers the following suggestion: "Perhaps there are more secrets to discover here? Maybe you could READ about them in a BOOK you BUY from a SHOP…" In its *Disgaea* series, Nippon Ichi turned breaking the fourth wall into a hobby, and *Trinity Universe*, with its wry character observations on RPG tropes such as boss fights, save points and special moves, is no different. But this explicit promotion of merchandise within the game reveals a greater truth: here is a game where the design has been driven by economics.

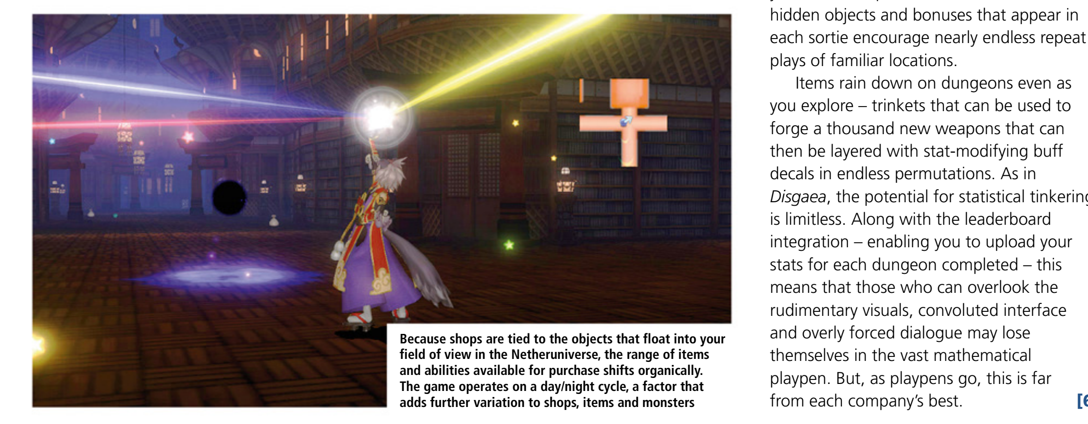
Take the Netheruniverse itself, for example. In contrast to the expanse suggested by its name, the game hub is a small, locked-off stretch of space. Objects float into and out of the orbit of your view – gigantic pieces of detritus, driftwood from a stray Katamari – bringing with them events, shops and dungeons. As you complete their tasks, you break them from your world's gravitational pull, thereby making room in your orbit for new, tougher objects to take their place – a conveyor belt of microcosms scaling in difficulty and rewards. Having the world come to the player like this is a neat conceit for the cash-strapped developer (of which there are three collaborators here), offering all the benefit of the JRPG trajectory at a fraction of the cost.

So, to add depth and interest to this small geography, Nippon Ichi, Gust and Idea Factory overcompensate by piling on the systems. What initially appears to be a straightforward, line-dancing, turn-based battle system soon reveals itself to be layered with complexity. Action Points available each turn can be spent in a great number of ways on attacks that combo across characters and can be stacked up from turn to turn. The ability to yoke detritus to your world enables you to farm experience, and the slew of hidden objects and bonuses that appear in each sortie encourage nearly endless repeat plays of familiar locations.

Items rain down on dungeons even as you explore – trinkets that can be used to forge a thousand new weapons that can then be layered with stat-modifying buff decals in endless permutations. As in *Disgaea*, the potential for statistical tinkering is limitless. Along with the leaderboard integration – enabling you to upload your stats for each dungeon completed – this means that those who can overlook the rudimentary visuals, convoluted interface and overly forced dialogue may lose themselves in the vast mathematical playpen. But, as playpens go, this is far from each company's best. **[6]**



Upon exiting a dungeon, you gain Evaluation Points based on your performance. Earn enough and your universe rank improves and you'll take on more difficult dungeons. It's a system that gives the game a fractured, gently non-linear feel



Because shops are tied to the objects that float into your field of view in the Netheruniverse, the range of items and abilities available for purchase shifts organically. The game operates on a day/night cycle, a factor that adds further variation to shops, items and monsters

Crossover to bear



Taking its cue from *Cross Edge*, *Trinity Universe* is the next in Nippon Ichi's crossover RPG collaborations, a presumably economical arrangement where risk, responsibility and IP are shared between developers. The benefit here is in the inclusion of characters from the *Disgaea* universe, as well as some from Gust's *Atelier Iris* series. The game is split into two stories, which intersect at various parts. When playing as Kanata, you'll have Tsubaki, Etna, Prinny and Pamela as your allies, while Rizelea has Flonne, Violet (from the Japanese-only *Atelier Violet*) and Lucius – names familiar to any fan of each developer's output.



Fighting the more difficult enemies demands that you keep your stamina topped up by picking off the constantly respawning weaker creatures. It adds a sliver of tactical depth, but proves frustrating during lengthier battles



Performing a risky soul steal move is the only way to top up your stamina bar and continue wielding sub-weapons. It's unexciting, but leads players away from lazy button-mashing

CLASH OF THE TITANS

FORMAT: 360 (VERSION TESTED), PS3
RELEASE: OUT NOW **PUBLISHER:** NAMCO BANDAI
DEVELOPER: GAME REPUBLIC

Bubo's back!



At least Bubo, the mechanical owl of the superior 1981 movie, gets more to do in the game than he does in the new film. Complete with cute sound effect and stop-motion-style animation he serves as a save point and also dishes out challenges. These are more of the same turgid battles, so they'll only really be of interest to gluttons for punishment, grinding nuts and those who mine even the least entertaining games for Trophies or Achievements.

The gods are angry and *Clash Of The Titans* is our punishment. How else to explain such a mediocre film tie-in? You'd think it would be easy to make a half-decent game based on a film built around CGI set-pieces, but developer Game Republic manages to botch it (perhaps thanks in part to the game's early development in the hands of the ill-fated Brash Entertainment). The action comes in trickles between lumpen cutscenes, and as painfully stilted dialogue gives way to laboured button-mashing it's genuinely difficult to decide which is worse.

The ancient Greek setting is thrown away, seemingly assembled from unconvincing film set facades complete with polystyrene rocks. The poorly rendered character models clip in and out of scenery and objects, and the gameplay itself is almost completely devoid of drama. The creatures Perseus battles appear from nowhere with little fanfare and merrily line up to be slaughtered. It's almost as if they're aware of how little enthusiasm is being sparked in the player, but that would suggest a flicker of intelligence behind their eyes – and there's little evidence of that.

Despite these lacklustre encounters, the game has the skeleton of a decent fighting system. Standard combos whittle away health, while QTE finishers have the added bonus of adding new weapons to Perseus' arsenal. These new toys, of which there are many, can then be worked into combos with various effects. Not all of which are good. For every martial-art ability that can drastically lengthen your time in the air, there are a handful of desperately unwieldy bludgeons and bows.

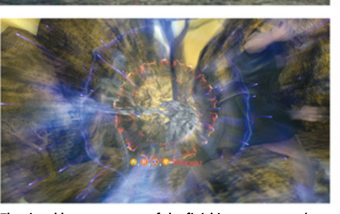
Each stage is divided into arbitrary tasks, meaning you'll have to wrestle your share of peasants and explore sparse locations before you get to advance the plot by killing something more monstrous, scaly, deadly or all of the above. It's a shame because these later encounters, such as a battle against a giant scorpion, open up the tactical advantages of swapping sub-weapons on the fly. But it's too little too late for a campaign that's short on urgency, and one that keeps its player on a tight leash, leaving little room for exploration or experimentation.

Clash Of The Titans' many failings are all the more surprising given that the movie is just one of many CGI-heavy offerings accused of feeling more like a game than a movie. It lacks the spectacle of a blockbuster and feels more like a B movie – and not a very good one at that. Given the scale of *God Of War* or the urgency of *Bayonetta* it could have transcended its faults to provide schlocky, popcorn entertainment. As it stands, it's more of a Greek tragedy. **[3]**





The one concession to defence is a roll that, if well timed, slows the action down so briefly that it speeds back up as Perseus gets to his feet, making it pointless



The timed button presses of the finishing moves aren't as spectacular as they should be, but they do gift you with new weapons and air moves that open up combos



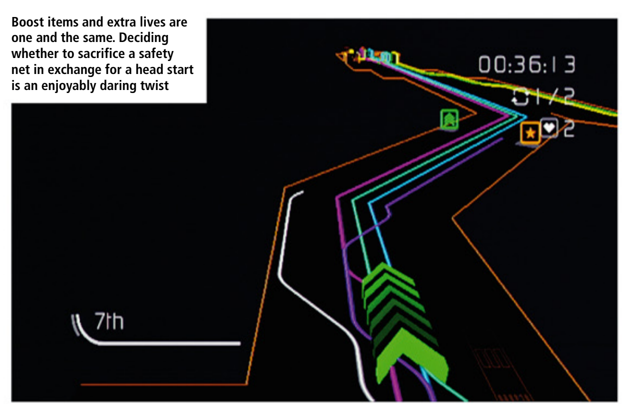
ART STYLE: LIGHT TRAX

FORMAT: WII **RELEASE:** OUT NOW
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO **DEVELOPER:** SKIP

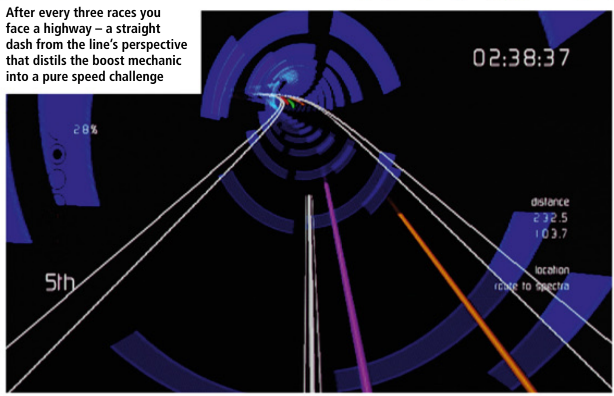
With stark neon colour schemes and an angular aesthetic, it's easy to imagine the denizens of Tron sitting down to enjoy an evening of *Art Style*: *Light Trax*, which aptly resembles that film's iconic light cycles. A racer zoomed out to the point of abstraction, vehicles are little more than thin streaks of colour on a black background, swerving around obstacles and weaving past rivals like blips on an oscilloscope.

Watching the racers slip between fixed tracks on a 2D plane has echoes of *Excitebike*, reinforced by the appearance of boost pads and sticky floors. However, the lack of anything as rational as track markers makes aligning your vehicle tricky. The acceleration mechanic is borrowed from the likes of *Burnout* – you build boost by sidling up against rivals, teasing out a neat pack mechanic. Without the boost, lines travel at a constant speed, forcing the strips to clump together to gain any kind of headway. Judging how long to remain in the pack before swerving in the face of obstacles adds to the event a tense element of playing chicken.

Like past WiiWare *Art Style* games *Orbient* and *Rotohex*, *Light Trax* is a remake of one of Skip's GBA *Bit Generations* series. *Dotsream*, as it was known then, was a strictly 2D affair, viewed from the side. On Wii, the lines now turn corners and negotiate ramps. More visually exciting, sure, but occasionally confusing. On busier tracks, it becomes difficult to tell where a perspective shift might leave you. As a result, it tends to be into a wall. Rougher corners can be learnt over time, however, and *Light Trax* continues to zip along the fine line between puzzler and racer neatly. **[7]**



Boost items and extra lives are one and the same. Deciding whether to sacrifice a safety net in exchange for a head start is an enjoyably daring twist

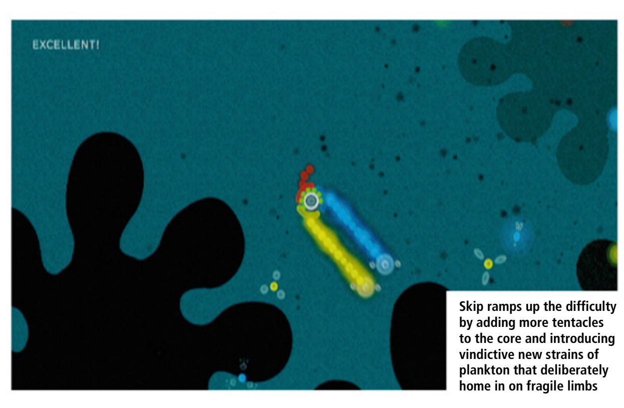


After every three races you face a highway – a straight dash from the line's perspective that distils the boost mechanic into a pure speed challenge



ART STYLE: PENTA TENTACLES

FORMAT: WII **RELEASE:** OUT NOW
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO **DEVELOPER:** SKIP

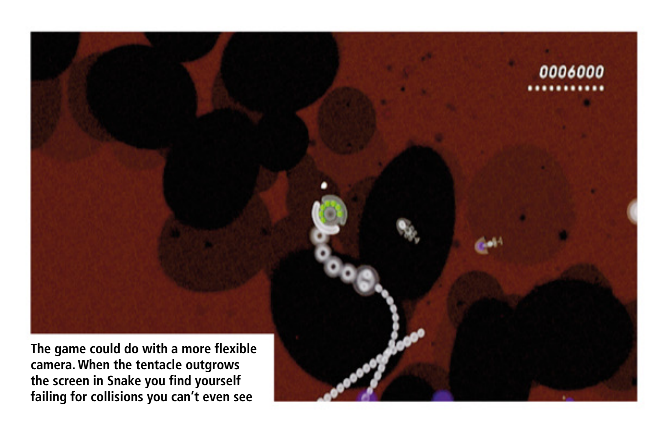


Skip ramps up the difficulty by adding more tentacles to the core and introducing vindictive new strains of plankton that deliberately home in on fragile limbs

After a successful stint on DSiWare, Skip's otherworldly puzzlers return to WiiWare. Set in a hazy gloom dotted with bright colours, *Penta Tentacles* plays like PSN's *Flow* meets *Ikaruga* via *Electroplankton*. A tentacled core is moved and spun to collide coloured limbs with like-coloured organisms. Growing with each speck gobbled and snapping upon collision with other colours, it prompts an uneasy balancing act of feeding and protection.

However, after the exact D-pad prods of DSiWare, *Penta Tentacles* feels loose and vague. Tentacles move in too organic a motion, making the task one of taming the organism rather than applying the tight arcadey reactions of Skip's previous work. The number of variables in those swirling limbs obscures the central idea and failure often feels unfair. Compare to the angular traffic management of DSi's *Intersect* or *Decode*'s number-swivelling algebra and it's hard to see any *Art Style* familial likeness.

An invulnerability item adds an interesting, literal, twist: charging it up requires the core to spin with its tentacles outstretched. Finding the space between to activate it feels more mechanically satisfying than the tentacle management itself. Likewise, other modes rein in the tentacles with moderate success. Snake mode sees you growing a single limb while eliminating unwanted blobs with the core, and Endless mode adds tentacle constricting items that have you policing growth so no one tentacle dominates the screen. Unpredictable tentacle movement hampers both modes, but they are the closest Skip comes to matching the addictiveness of its handheld efforts. **[5]**



The game could do with a more flexible camera. When the tentacle outgrows the screen in Snake you find yourself failing for collisions you can't even see





JETT ROCKET

FORMAT: WII **RELEASE:** OUT NOW
PUBLISHER: SHIN'EN **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE

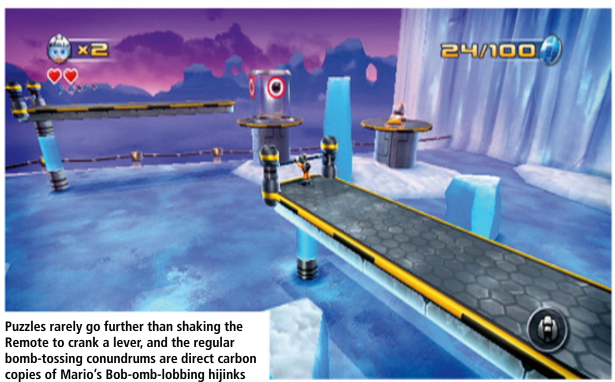
Few platforms boast the technical disparity of WiiWare. For every delicate *LostWinds* and *World Of Goo*, there's a shoddy *Pong Toss* or *Pokémon Ranch*. Shin'en is fast becoming the poster child for the former camp, with an in-house engine that can match most thirdparty retail games in visual quality. In its reflective metals, shimmering waters and chunky toybox aesthetic, *Jett Rocket* almost emulates *Mario Galaxy*'s visual treats. For a thousand points, you certainly get a glimpse of a shiny WiiWare future.

Unfortunately, after an enjoyable debut – slight but sharp physics puzzler *The Art of Balance* – Shin'en has put its considerable talents to more generic use. Token collecting, moving platforms, slippery ice worlds – *Jett Rocket* is a conveyor belt of platforming tropes regurgitated without wit or vision. *Rocket*'s only original hook, a jetpack, is a clumsy piece of kit that stubbornly stops climbing after a couple of feet, requiring you to align your launch platform with the desired destination. Other vehicles – skateboards and jetskis – feel too weightless. The parachute, which actually should feel weightless, is too rigid.

Jett Rocket's mistakes remind us of the N64 days, when developers were feeling their way through Nintendo's brave new 3D world. Jett's damage animation sends him helplessly flying through the air and promptly off heights you've just laboriously climbed. The camera grinds against invisible walls, refusing to cast light on crannies full of tokens, which are needlessly spread out and hidden to double a slim game length. Everything feels a little unsure of itself – too much time spent on the textures and not enough on the world they reflect. A shame. **[4]**



***Jett Rocket* shares *Galaxy*'s rampant turnaround of ideas, the difference being we're happy to see the back of these anaemic asides. This has to be the slowest jetski ever conceived**

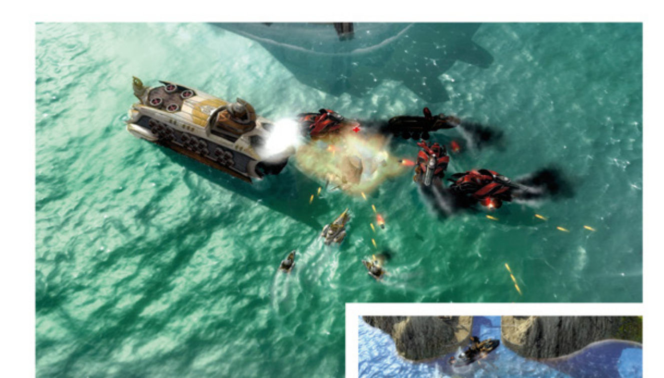


Puzzles rarely go further than shaking the Remote to crank a lever, and the regular bomb-tossing conundrums are direct carbon copies of Mario's Bob-omb-lobbing hijinks



AQUA: NAVAL WARFARE

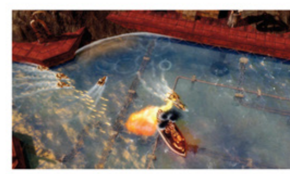
FORMAT: 360 **RELEASE:** OUT NOW
PUBLISHER: IEM **DEVELOPER:** GAME DISTILLERY



One boss, the Prize Cruiser (top), chugs into battle with guns, torpedoes, a tractor beam, a bow-mounted giant zapper, a huge energy bar and a complete inability to defend itself should you attack from the opposite corner of the screen

Naval combat game *Aqua* looks suspiciously like an RTS that has, through some unfathomable process, become a dull-as-ditchwater twin-stick shooter. Everything on screen, from the units and environments to the camera and energy bars, would look entirely at home in a middling version of Gas Powered Games' brilliant *Rise Of Nations: Rise Of Legends*. Its action, however, resembles Dreamcast game *Armada*, occuring almost entirely at sea and leaving all the interesting stuff stranded on seldom-visited shores.

It's a steampunk game, of course, which implies a certain invention that simply isn't here. If the game achieves anything, it's making the thin line between 'motion comic' and 'placeholder cutscene' look like the Suez Canal. Its story is told using doodled cuts of concept art that look uncomfortable sharing a scene. Heroes Benjamin Grey and Polly Edison, appearing exclusively as hand-drawn portraits, look the same despite a supposed gender gap. Their vocal performances, meanwhile, would make Ed Wood call for a second take.



The water effects are nicely done, but the ripples make it look like you're fighting in a bathtub. The flamethrower is one of the more exotic weapons

Few of the features and battles show any signs of refinement. A fleet control system involves few options – cover me, defend that, kill them – which, even on normal difficulty, can see battles win themselves. The Warshop, which you visit now and then in '90s shoot 'em up style, enables you to pick three of the game's unremarkable weapons for each mission, buffing their stats with upgrades. Neither these nor the three different classes of ship have much discernable impact on the action in between visits.

The enemies are more diverse, if again based on an apparent RTS template. Bombers circle overhead to fire torpedoes at your allies, flamethrowers come into play, and some units flip above and below the waves, forcing a switch between ammo types. Some even probe the occasional harbour with spotlights, opening a pen of attack ships if you're spotted. So much of *Aqua*, though, feels merely like the crude payoff to a tank rush, your fire moving from one stubborn target to the next until victory is declared. The multiplayer modes – co-op, deathmatch and checkpoint races – add nothing more than players to the mix. **[3]**



APPLE JACK

FORMAT: 360 RELEASE: OUT NOW
PUBLISHER: MY OWL SOFTWARE DEVELOPER: IN-HOUSE

For an Xbox Live Indie Game to come so close to an ideal concoction of teasing challenge and pure frustration is a great achievement. Unfortunately, *Apple Jack* doesn't quite walk this line perfectly, occasionally falling into pad-clenching irritation.

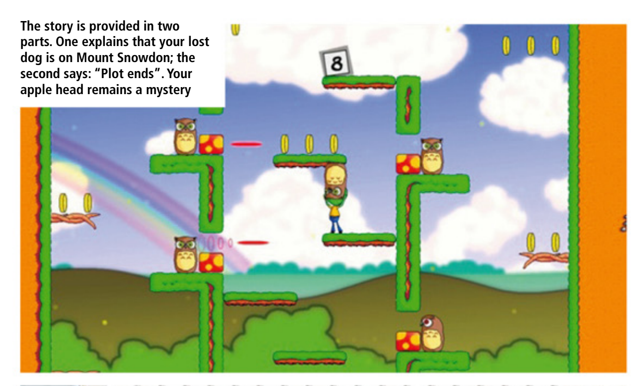
Each room is a combination of platforms and puzzles, with the player able to jump and grab upside-down enemies. Lobbing two enemies together is enough for them to burst and disappear in a shower of coins. Repeat this process with another duo of foes and your reward is doubled, up to ludicrous multipliers. A good few hits will coat every solid surface on the screen in gold and silver coins, and you have a few seconds to collect as many as possible before they disappear.

Later levels add colour coding, forcing the apple-headed protagonist to throw projectiles and send creatures clattering into their friends of the same hue. There's a distinct nod to *Braid* in this approach, holding back on stomping nearby forces to tackle some of the stage's more complex sections. Thinking a step ahead is mandatory; three steps is preferable.

Each of the game's worlds is named after a British county, opening with the distinctly un-gamelike Suffolk. Impressively, each of the individual themes has its own twist – a fresh way of looking at the base mechanics that rarely treads on past toes.

The lack of big-developer polish is apparent in only a few areas. Collision detection fuzz means you'll swear blind that you landed on an enemy's head, only to wallop against their lethal side. The step between death and respawn, meanwhile, is too long, with canned animations infuriating when repeated. And they *will* be repeated.

But this is an XBLA Indie Game, and My Owl Software's engaging puzzler-cum-platformer is a fist-sized diamond in a surfeit of rough. **[8]**



The story is provided in two parts. One explains that your lost dog is on Mount Snowdon; the second says: "Plot ends". Your apple head remains a mystery

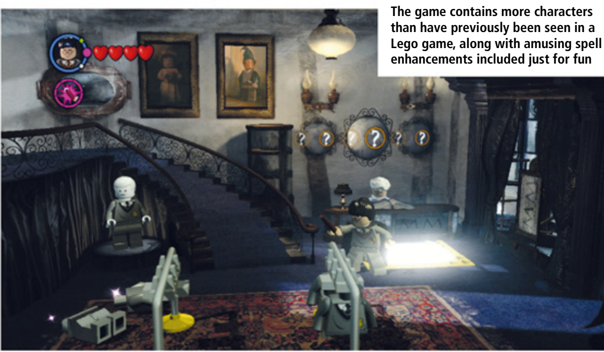


Enemies are an odd mix of owls, pandas and washing machines. Each has a routine – the tutu-clad pigs that follow the player around will leap from edges to chase you, but pandas are less kamikaze



LEGO HARRY POTTER YEARS 1-4

FORMAT: 360, PC, PS3 (VERSION TESTED), WII
RELEASE: OUT NOW PUBLISHER: WARNER BROS
DEVELOPER: TT GAMES



The game contains more characters than have previously been seen in a Lego game, along with amusing spell enhancements included just for fun



Here, Harry and chums cross a chasm by building makeshift stepping stones. Manipulating objects using this spell is a cornerstone of the adventure

TT Games has rarely struggled to communicate the appeal of Star Wars, Indiana Jones and Batman, but has it ever encapsulated the true appeal of Lego? Fun as its past games were, more time was spent smashing up constructions than putting them together. *Lego Harry Potter Years 1-4* addresses this with a free build mechanic. Using the levitation spell, Wingardium Leviosa, Hogwarts' finest can lift blocks and piece them together to complete puzzles. Although the word 'free' is misleading – the placement of blocks is quite strict – it's a step in the right direction considering what lies at the heart of the Lego experience.

Taking in four chapters of JK Rowling's universe, the vast Hogwarts school emerges as the game's most engaging character, a constantly evolving puzzle box/playground that unfolds its secrets as the player's magical prowess develops. At times, however, the task of cramming in every detail takes its toll. Spells can be forgotten as soon as they're introduced and, while it's admirable that every plot point is touched upon, sometimes it's at the expense of a rounded experience. The variety of things that eagerly bubble over the game's environments can make progress messy, even despite the ghostly signposting. But the sidelining of combat in favour of puzzles suits the subject matter. Here, progress is barred by the next piece of the puzzle rather than perseverance against a tide of plastic aggressors. Even boss fights, for the most part, are reimagined this way.

Lego Harry Potter is a more focused experience than, say, *Lego Indiana Jones 2*, but proves ungainly in its own way. Ultimately, younger players and Potter freaks will find its spell most difficult to break. **[6]**


Wii
WarioWare
SMOOTH MOVES

TIME EXTEND

WARIOWARE: SMOOTH MOVES

FORMAT: **WII**
PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **IN-HOUSE**
ORIGIN: **JAPAN**
RELEASE: **2006 (JAPAN), 2007 (UK, US)**





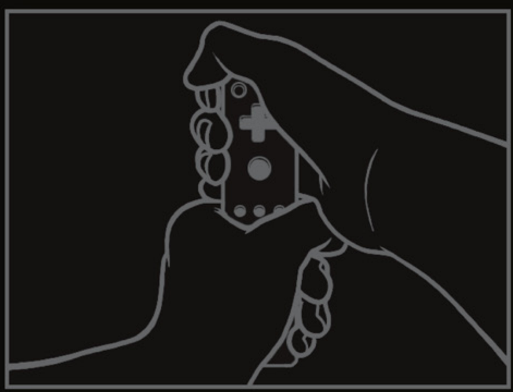












Nintendo's greedy anti-hero seemed to be just making up the numbers in the early Wii days, but should we have paid him more attention?

We've been around these parts before. Readers will recall **E**179's look back at the original *Made In Wario*, a GBA game about what happens when a player presses 'A'. It was a package whose focus on the nuts and bolts of interaction – what makes games work – blossomed into inventive mini-essays on what we've been doing with our fingers since forever. *WarioWare: Smooth Moves* is different. Its DS predecessor, *WarioWare: Touched!*, was the first in the series to be used as proof-of-concept – showcasing a new system's controls in the hope other developers might take the ideas and run with them. *Touched!* was good fun, but a touchscreen is always a touchscreen. No matter what it shows, you're performing similar gestures in a small space: snip, pull, slice, match, solve – its games were grouped so that you were doing fundamentally the same thing over and over. The magic of *WarioWare* is that you never resent the repetition – each slice, greedily devoured, is served up again and again with the tiniest adjustments that change your interaction – and it's where *Touched!* just falls short.

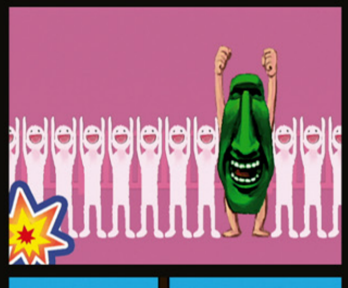
Smooth Moves, by contrast, fizzes with ideas for Wii control, because it was the only game close to launch that could. *Twilight Princess*'s GameCube origins meant it couldn't stray too far from the *Zelda* formula, *Wii Sports* was about refining five control schemes to perfection, and *Wii Play* was designed as a gentle introduction. The Wii Remote can move anywhere around you, be held in any way you can think of, and be swung wildly or tilted imperceptibly, but in all the time since launch, it seems like *WarioWare*'s the only game that noticed. Hold it to your nose, on your head, at your hip, on your palm, put it on the floor or just drop it.

A defining characteristic of *WarioWare* is nostalgia. So *Smooth Moves*, introducing a revolutionary console, is in the worst situation possible: there are no precedents. The controller antics obscure it, but the proof-of-concept burden weighs much more heavily than it ever did for *Touched!* For the first time, *WarioWare* can't deliver something old as something new. *Smooth Moves* is forced to reinterpret the past, and imagine possible futures.

It's not about deconstruction any more. *Smooth Moves* is about reconstruction, returning to those nuts and bolts Wario had so gleefully examined and tossed into his basket, and wondering what new uses could be found – which, in some cases, means building entire games for them. Nowadays we're all a little waggle-fatigued, but *Smooth Moves* is about goofy precision rather than random waving. Its games tread the line between the Remote's tilt sensor and pointing capabilities, neatly alternating and often using both.

The Wii Remote can be held in any way you can think of, but in all the time since launch, it seems like WarioWare's the only game that noticed

The corollary is that controls now have to be explained. Contrary to *WarioWare*'s quickfire style, the series' one-word instructions are not up to the task of detailing your movement as well as outlining *Smooth Moves*' challenges. The wry solution is etiquette. The Wii Remote is referred to as the "Form Baton" and an American voiceover explains each style with droll metaphor before it's used: you hold it like an umbrella "with the quiet dignity of a circus clown in the rain". For the Chauffeur pose,

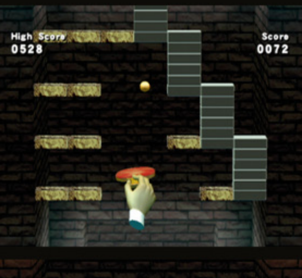






The Temple of Form lets you replay minigames in any of their increasingly harder incarnations, which shows that the harder they get, the more surreal the payoff









Tower Tennis is a mini masterpiece, its simple but deep controls making every trip through the tower a test of skill and planning. You can even turn the bat on its side for an instant to squeeze through gaps

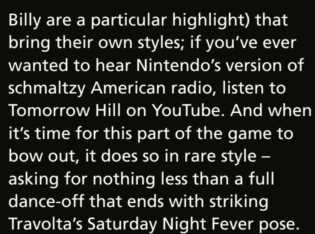
you hold the Remote firmly at both ends, and "as the Form Baton turns, so too the Earth and all upon it, from liver to liveryman".

This awareness of the physical object is central to *Smooth Moves*. Nintendo's concern that players wear the wrist strap can feel preachy even though it's genuine, but *Smooth Moves* inserts a game for which you require the tether. "Drop it!" If you're wearing the strap, pass. If not, oops.

The games are gleefully daft in their fit with the Remote poses. Drink a glass of juice using the Umbrella pose, careful not to go too quickly and spill it. Head a football with the Mohawk, do a hula dance with The Big Cheese, and tilt balls down holes with The Waiter. Aesthetically, it carries on the patchwork brilliance of the series, which has always been visually underrated, taking you from salarymen to cheerleading lions, from pencil sketch to polygon to 3D afro.

The standard format holds for the initial stages, a trek through themed minigame collections using one or two particular styles. Wario's own supporting cast returns for bizarre cameos (Jimmy and his brother Billy are a particular highlight) that bring their own styles; if you've ever wanted to hear Nintendo's version of schmaltzy American radio, listen to Tomorrow Hill on YouTube. And when it's time for this part of the game to bow out, it does so in rare style – asking for nothing less than a full dance-off that ends with striking Travolta's Saturday Night Fever pose.

Tower Tennis is the naughty, bad side of Nintendo, giving up all the pain and frustration you want, and it's irresistible



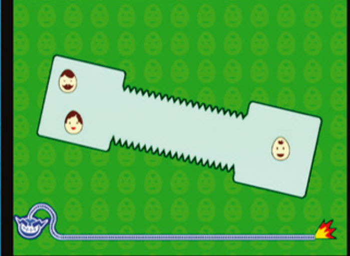
But *WarioWare: Smooth Moves* has a secret beyond this – six secrets, in fact. There are 'big' games waiting to be unlocked in Diamond City, and each does what the rest of *Smooth Moves* doesn't. They spend time with the good old days, and remake them in Wii's image.

The earliest game genres involved bat-and-ball mechanics, and Tower Tennis plucks *Breakout*'s idea of destructible blocks from this lineage, the Wii Remote twist arriving in the form of a tilt-controlled paddle. Bounce the ball as far up the tower as you can, breaking the bricks that impede progress. Success or failure rests on the tiniest margins, the tilting of the Wii Remote never betraying your steady hand, and this precision – impossible with a standard controller – is the magic ingredient. The speed remains constant, occasionally interrupted by special flowers that boost you upwards, and the obstacles become more fiendish as the line between inspiration and failure becomes harder and harder to walk. The killing kiss, the touch of genius, is your single life – brutal, perhaps, but absolutely necessary to make that height feel like anything at all. It's the game that 4am was built for, with the inevitability of your boss frowning like Bowser the morning after, but your new score of 544 softening the blow. Don't be fooled by the simple visuals. Tower Tennis is the naughty, bad side of Nintendo, giving up all the pain and frustration you want, and it's totally irresistible for it.

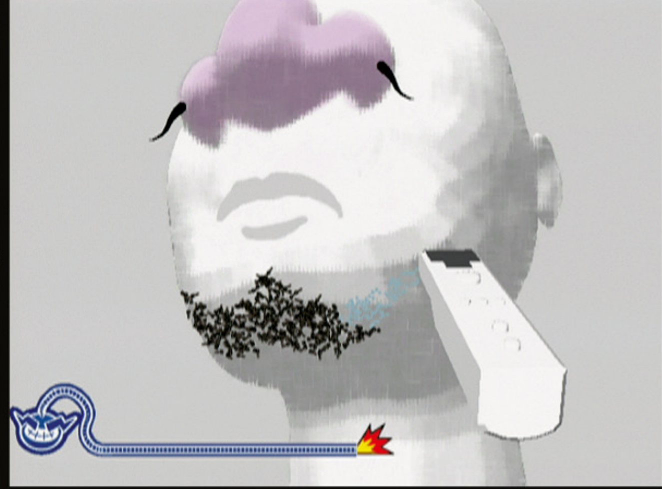
The real surprise about Tower Tennis, though, is its place in the











The most satisfying mechanic in Pyoro S is lining up a perfect tongue poke to kill an entire row at once and score an apple; get enough and power-up apples appear, allowing you to smash through baddies like this (left)



WAAAAAAH!

The multiplayer, outside of three notable exceptions, is a little half-baked – strange, because it's the area the *WarioWare* team talked up the most. Escaping censure are Bungie Buddies, Star Nose and Darts. All the other modes are either too unforgiving – bombing out a player for losing just a single minigame – or rely too much on chance to be long-term amusements. For example, one mode has you completing minigames just for the chance to cut a rope, which can throw you to the alligators as easily as your opponent. The final black mark? You have to unlock it by playing through singleplayer.

larger undercurrent of *Smooth Moves*. Thought it's definitely the highlight, it's just one of a series combining old mechanics with the Wii Remote. Block Star has the compulsive tidiness of good *Tetris* technique, but here you're holding the Remote on the palm of your hand to control the floor, rather than the falling bricks. Pyoro, a *WarioWare* constant, had been no more than a flightless bird in forgettable bonuses, but Pyoro S (the 'S' references the 'Sensor' controls) gives him wings in a 2D top-down shooter where Remote tilting aims his Yoshi-like extendable tongue. Its clever bonus system is based on killing all enemies in a wave (from three to four) at once, always tempting you to get too close or spend too much time lining up a shot.

There's a *Balloon Kid* remake (Balloon Trip) that lasts longer than our arms did, in which you flap to keep afloat and move. Turning the game into 3D was a step too far for this particular mechanic, and the repetition means it soon palls, but the controls don't falter. Can Shooter seems an obvious one, but then you begin shooting rockets out of the sky and noticing that these cans levitate and wiggle across the screen. Finally, Game & Watch's *Flagman* is remade as Tortoise and Hare, a flag-matching diversion that proves a point about the Nunchuk controller.

The Remote's little brother needs someone to stand up for it – it has a torrid time when it's not simply performing as an analogue stick, its three-axis accelerometer rarely a convincing grenade-thrower. *Smooth Moves*' multiplayer proves the fault isn't with the hardware but its applications: in Star Nose, two players share the Remote and Nunchuk to pilot noses through a tunnel collecting fruit, and one game is never just one. Bungee Buddies has the two of you sprinting through a city, a sky walkway and eventually the heavens themselves, the Remote and Nunchuk held at the hips and obstacles scrolling down to be jumped over (as well as suspended cake slices that boost the buddies forward). Never do you feel compromised by the Nunchuk. Why is it so rare that this is the case?

Smooth Moves was lost among the early Wii software line-up – not as obviously new as *Wii Sports*, as accessible as *Wii Play* or comparable to *Twilight Princess*. Hindsight's kind, but perhaps especially so because *Smooth Moves* wasn't the launch pad for the Wii Remote's potential we all thought; over three years after its release, it still stands as its most complete, if piecemeal, expression.

No other game has played so loosely with the controls and yet kept them so intrinsic, and Nintendo's platform could do with a few that dare to try. Instead we have the limited appeal, and even more limited uses, of the MotionPlus add-on, and a formula among the majority of thirdparty Wii games – simple, uninvolving gestures repeated ad nauseum. *Smooth Moves* imagined an incredible Wii future. One where its controls were even more boldly transformative, dragging the past into the present, as well as wildly fertile in their own right. What an idea. And what a shame that Wario, fat and greedy and forever doomed to minigames, was the only one who could see it.



Weave! Pull! Find! Flip! The surrealism of *WarioWare* is only possible because it's equally comfortable with mundane settings



THE MAKING OF...
THE TRAP DOOR

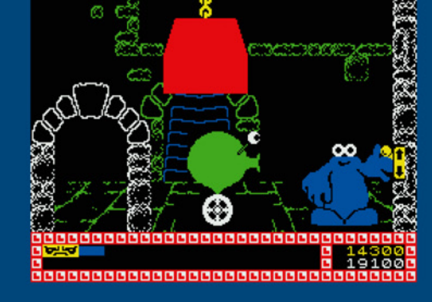
How a technically advanced and conceptually faithful game was built around cooking worms for dinner

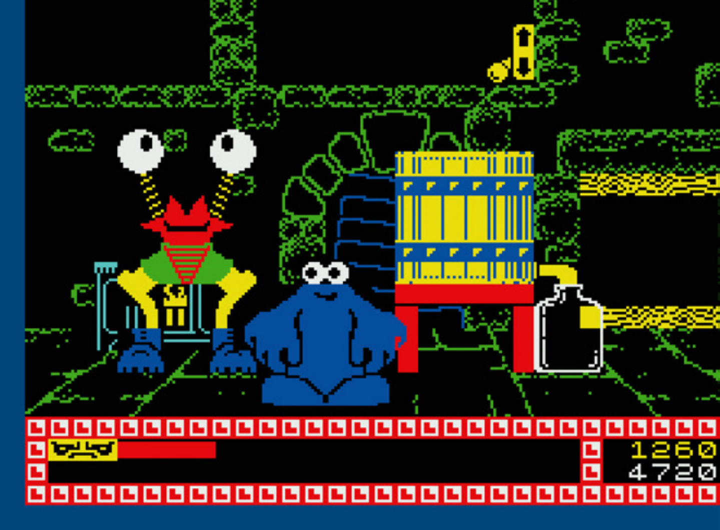
FORMAT: **AMSTRAD CPC, COMMODORE 64, ZX SPECTRUM** PUBLISHER: **PIRANHA GAMES** DEVELOPER: **DON PRIESTLEY** ORIGIN: **UK** RELEASE: **1986**

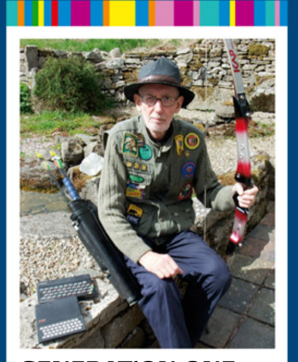
Expectations for licensed games aimed at children are never high. It's rare for a developer to engage with their source material beyond taking well-loved and bankable characters and shoving them into a mediocre platformer or, on occasion, a karting game. Even among the honourable exceptions, few children's titles match the ingenuity and intellectual challenge of 8bit classic *The Trap Door*. Based on the '80s claymation TV series of the same name, *The Trap Door* closely mirrors the show's format, as Berk the blue-hued manservant attempts to fulfil the culinary demands of the unseen 'Thing Upstairs'.

Still, players loading up *The Trap Door* for the first time in 1986 would be more likely to notice the high quality of its visuals than its idiosyncratic design. It's easy to raise eyebrows now at reviews asking readers if they can "tell the difference between [*The Trap Door*] and an animated cartoon," but, in its day, *The Trap Door* was a supremely clever game whose ingenious engineering enabled some striking art design.

The Trap Door's creator was **Don Priestley**, who in 1979, aged 39, left behind a career in teaching in order to pursue a path in programming. "I'd had enough of teaching reluctant, maladjusted teenage boys and decided to drop out rather than burn out," he recalls. "Computers were then a hot subject, with Maggie Thatcher boasting about 'one in every school'. I asked my







GENERATION ONE

Now in easy reach of his 70th birthday, Don Priestley (above) had an early introduction to computing. "My first experience on a computer was in 1974 at Plymouth Tech at a teachers' course on educational technology," he recalls.

"It was a PDP-11 [a 16bit DEC minicomputer] about the size of two wardrobes. Input and output were by teletype only, so no screen, and my magnificent program, a times table tester, was stored on punched tape which was rolled up and had an elastic band put around it before it went in my pocket ready for the next exciting instalment."

The first time Priestley ever saw a computer-generated image was during his Pascal programming night class. "The high point was when one of the students brought in a Sinclair ZX80, complete with a flask of ice cubes to stop it overheating, and a portable TV," he recalls. "I was amazed at this machine – it was the first computer with a screen I'd ever seen."

son, who was about 13, whether his grammar school had one. They had, but it was kept locked away in the sixth form maths department. I decided to enrol us both in a night school programming course." As strange as it may seem today, the course did not provide any actual computers to experiment with, but instead a theoretical introduction to the Pascal language. "We could write programs on coding sheets which the teacher took to Lancaster University to turn into punched cards which went into a mainframe," explains Priestley. "Next week we each received a few sheets of error messages."

Despite these limitations, Priestley persevered and later bought a Sinclair ZX81 computer in kit form with £80 worth of unemployment benefits. Soon he was writing hybrid programs in BASIC and machine code, eventually selling ZX81 game *Mazogs* to Bug Byte for £1,000. Most of his subsequent Spectrum titles were published by Dk'tronics, a living-room outfit run by Dave Heelas that specialised in Spectrum add-ons. "One day he rang me to say that he'd thrown in his lot with some 'businessmen' who would give him proper premises, staff, accounting and management for a slice of the action. I was offered the job of software director at £24,000 a year, unlimited expenses and a big shiny new company car," says Priestley. "I had a long think about this – about five seconds."

It was at this point that Priestley began his long association with licensed products, then as now an easy marketing hook for any new title. "Dk'tronics managed to get the Popeye licence from King Features, Inc," says Priestley. There were conditions, however: "The nice man from KFI said that Popeye was to look the part, with a proper sailor suit, tattoo on arm, corncob pipe and facial expressions." Priestley achieved this, and the result was his first 'supersprite'. "It was just impossible to make it smaller," he explains, "KFI were delighted with the first offering of Popeye, with no background, swaggering across the screen."

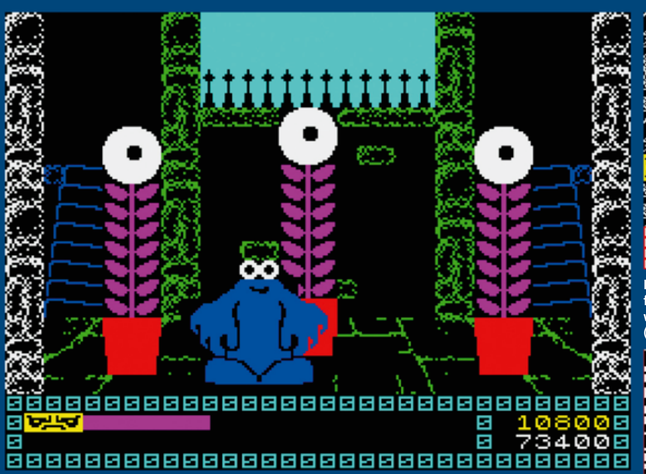
Not only were the gigantic sprites unlike what gamers had come to expect, but *Popeye* (and later *The Trap Door*) also featured another technical feat long thought impossible on ZX Spectrum hardware: a complete lack of colour clash. Colour clash was caused by the limitations of the display memory in a number of 8bit computers, resulting in a maximum of only two colours per 8x8-pixel cell, often creating ugly results. Priestley's workaround partly involved the scale of his sprites, which could fill whole cells without causing the character to appear overly blocky, but was also the result of a large amount of time-consuming and tedious work, with the author using up reams of graph paper while working out complex data tables to account for every colour-clashing eventuality. "Although it was complicated and time consuming, it worked, and became my trademark for many games thereafter," he explains.

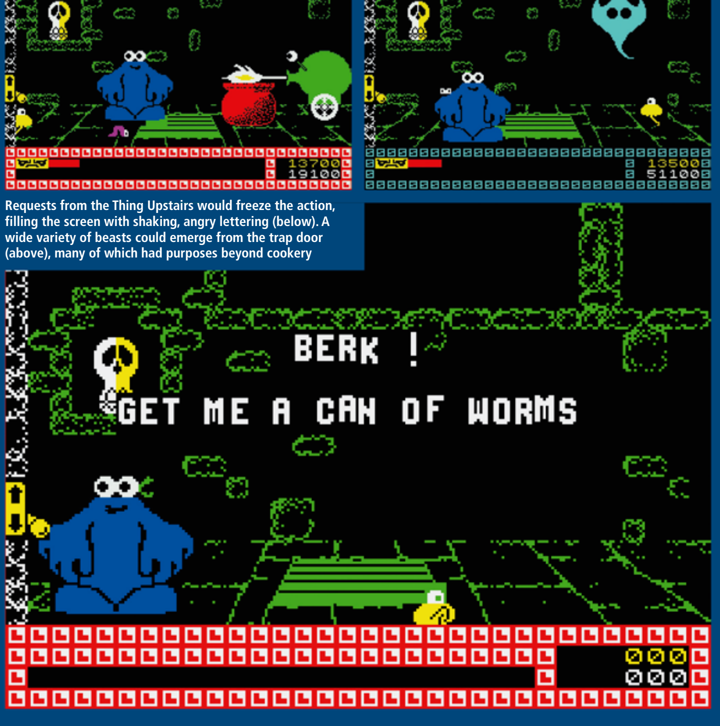
Although Priestley was responsible for many of Dk'tronics' biggest hits, he was made redundant after just two years. "The computer games bubble was bursting, games software houses were going to the wall, and I was unemployed," he recalls. Now working freelance, Priestley was approached by book publisher Macmillan, which in 1986 was attempting to break into the videogame market with its Piranha label. "I thought then that their timing was, well, crap, but understandably kept mum about it," he says.

> "I thought, 'God, nobody's going to be able to finish this', so I introduced Boni the skull to make some helpful comments"

Piranha had acquired the licence for the as-yet-unaired Trap Door TV series, and asked Priestley to design a game around it. The TV series' large claymation characters were clearly a perfect match for Priestley's supersprite technology, which had been improved in the intervening years in order to run at a more nimble pace ("I think *Popeye* ran at about four frames a second!"). But while the supersprite graphics may have improved, they were





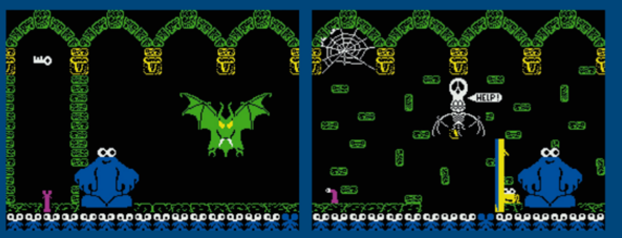


Requests from the Thing Upstairs would freeze the action, filling the screen with shaking, angry lettering (below). A wide variety of beasts could emerge from the trap door (above), many of which had purposes beyond cookery

still tedious to implement and harder still to shoehorn into the Spectrum's tiny memory. "It may be a surprise to know that I wasn't a very good programmer," admits Priestley. "I often used teenage whizzkids to take a piece of my code, which worked OK, and make it smaller and faster. This they could do even though the product was still basically all mine." But while Priestley was able to ensure that *The Trap Door* looked the part, what was less clear was how the show, which had little to no action element, would translate into a game.

As in the TV series, Berk is tasked with making a series of gruesome dishes for his master, the unseen Thing Upstairs. The castle Berk and his master share is represented as a world of just six screens. Each is filled with various tools or creatures, all of which can be interacted with whether they're relevant to the current recipe or not. In order to collect the living, monstrous ingredients Berk's master would so often demand, players would have to open the eponymous trap door and release the beasties within. "As all the ingredients had to be found and prepared within a relatively small game area I came up with the idea of hiding them or making them difficult to collect," says Priestley. "So, with a bit of head scratching, I managed to get Berk to pick things up, put them in containers, put containers in containers, and either carry the containers or push them along," he explains. "What really made any task tricky was that all the ingredients, containers and trapdoor monsters were all available all the time, so if you were asked to make Eyeball Squash and Boiled Slimies you could end up with Boiled Eyeballs and Squashed Slimies!"

Indeed, the freedom to experiment which *The Trap Door* offered was almost unparalleled. "[Berk] had to be inquisitive, experimental and persistent, which were the characteristics I wanted to engender in the player," states Priestley. There were concerns, however, that such freeform design might alienate players used to a more linear experience. "At some stage I thought, 'God, nobody's going to be able to finish this'," Priestley explains, "so I introduced Boni the skull to make some helpful comments." The presence of Boni, a disembodied skull residing in an alcove by the trap door, not only made for a less oblique experience, but also brought the design of the game closer towards fully replicating the concept of the TV series, in which Boni would (for the most part) act in a similarly helpful capacity.



1987 Sequel *Through The Trap Door* (above) reviewed well, though it was more of a departure from the TV show's format than its predecessor. Some of its puzzles require rather precise solutions, however

Although it wasn't enough to sustain Piranha for long, *The Trap Door* was a hit, both critically and commercially, though Priestley feels there was little in the way of genuinely constructive criticism for any of his games. "I didn't get much feedback except for magazine reviews based on a fairly cursory look at the graphics, sound and any technical innovations," he complains. "I really don't know, for example, how many players got through all the levels of *Jumbly*, one of my most accomplished programs but horribly difficult and confusing for many."

Nonetheless, the success of *The Trap Door* was enough to secure a sequel, entitled *Through The Trap Door*, now generally less well regarded than its predecessor. "I had free rein to do anything I pleased, so I sent Berk and Drutt on a linear adventure to find dear old Boni," Priestly explains. The resulting game, which saw players switching between control of Berk and leaping yellow spider Drutt, still has plenty of logic puzzles alongside its larger action element, but despite being bigger the game world feels more restrictive and less open to experimentation.

It wasn't the last supersprite game though: Priestley went on to create the Spitting Image-inspired royal footman sim *Flunky* and the surreal *Gregory Loses his Clock*. Priestley recalls the latter as home to one of his major innovations: "I developed a method of making hundreds of similar but not identical screens of background graphics, each generated from just a two-byte number."

Still, none of Priestley's later works, as well-received as they were, would turn their significant technical achievements to the task of bringing to life a world as fully formed as that of *The Trap Door*. His game could never hope – with or without colour clash – to look just like the TV series it was based on, but it did, in what today would still be an unusual step for a licenced product, reflect the show's principles and concepts in its own design. Modern games may look like cartoons, but it's rare that they feel like them.

Codeshop

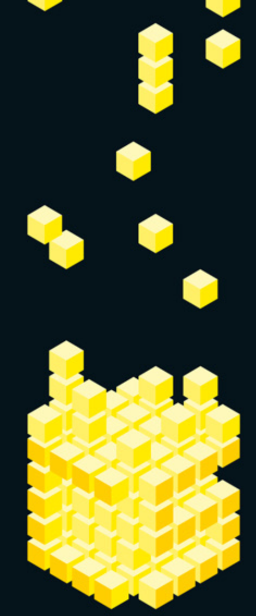
Tracking developments in development

A full range of motion

Softkinetic was the first to research 3D gesture recognition. With Kinect stirring interest, what is the technology's pioneer up to?



Michel Tombroff, CEO, Softkinetic





www.softkinetic.net

"Back in 2003, no one was looking into gesture-based technology. 3D cameras were only used in specific industrial and military environments. That was the genius of Softkinetic's founders – they were young and had a great idea and decided to go for it." CEO **Michel Tombroff** is obviously proud of the company he was brought in to head in 2007. Beginning as a research project seven years ago, Softkinetic is a middleware provider whose technology can turn any 3D camera into a gesture-sensing input device: "Our software analyses data in real time and reconstructs an understanding of the user's position, body parts, skeleton and joints."

Acting as an interpretive program, Softkinetic's technology forms an image of the user. There are three techniques that can be used to turn an image tri-dimensional: stereoscopic, 'structured light' and 'time of flight' (see 'Time and space'). "For us, it doesn't matter about the camera as long as we get a clean 'depth map' output," says Tombroff. The detail of the resulting image is a matter of camera quality. This can limit Softkinetic's ability to pinpoint specific details – such as fingers, for example – but Tombroff is optimistic about his company's attention to capturing minuscule movements: "As soon as cameras improve in that respect, it's not a problem for us to detect individual finger or even facial gestures."

Softkinetic's first push into videogames was in 2008: "Our first application of the technology was in entertainment: fitness equipment and coin-operated machines. The first videogame project was with EA Sports in 2008." The company continues to work in this more public, open-air space: "We've designed an American football game with Sprint in the US. You play the role of a quarterback in front of a large display in a place like a stadium." Similar, too, is *Silhouette*, a rhythm-based, live-action version of the concept championed by the BBC's Hole In The Wall. "The user has to stand in front of the camera and assume the shape of incoming walls," says Tombroff. It's easy to see the applications in the home for people who haven't the faculties or interest to play a more 'gamey' game.

As 3D cameras hit the price point that'll let them encroach on the home market, Softkinetic's clients are finding and testing new ways of incorporating 3D imaging technology. "A company called Silverfit in the Netherlands has





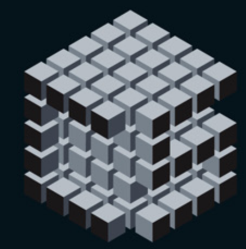
Many early applications have focused on simple experiences. US telecoms giant Sprint appropriated Softkinetic's tech to make a simple quarterback game: just move your arm to throw the ball (right)







Silhouette (below) is simple: make the shape on the screen with your body. Designed for multiple casual players, Softkinetic sees this kind of game being delivered through the TV rather than a game console



an amazing concept: a home-based videogame/exercise platform for senior and disabled people. It shows the value of the technology – for that population, even holding a Wii Remote is too complicated. They just step in front of the camera and they have a mini *Dance Dance Revolution* type of game, with some simple scenarios and puzzles."

Other companies – including a firm named Respondesign in the US – have taken Softkinetic's middleware as a central tenet of their fitness game development. Is this its main market? Tombroff ponders: "There is now the emergence of a new category of platforms that are based on television with the announcement of things like Google TV. We're working with manufacturers of those high-end platforms on delivering casual games,





"Now 3D cameras are coming to the market, there is a great appetite to build and develop those games"

at least, to that platform." His argument is that for 3D gesture technology to become the norm, and for future generations to control their videogames with movement, they'll need to get used to using those gestures.

But living-room casualware isn't the limit of Softkinetic's possible uses, with implementation in firstperson shooters and other more typical gaming genres among the first of the technology's testbeds. "It gives a sense of immersion in the game and it's very intuitive. You turn left, you turn right and the image turns with you – move closer and it zooms." Tombroff confirms he's working with a few developers on more traditional, yet-to-be-announced games.

There's another wing to Softkinetic: the company's development studio. Life as a middleware provider in a fast-changing environment means the technology requires constant updates and refinements. Tombroff explains the reasoning behind the spin-off studio: "The idea is that we started to accumulate a lot of expertise and knowledge. We built that studio to be a really advanced, applied group for the the technology in relation to our clients." Working so tightly with your own product – or, as Tombroff describes it, 'eating your own food' – breeds a level of familiarity that defines the direction of further development.

When we ask if Softkinetic finds the looming shadow of Microsoft's Kinect a direct threat, Tombroff considers his answer for a moment. "Kinect is a platform and only works with a specific environment. Now that the cameras are coming to the market with Kinect – and other platforms that will soon announce 3D cameras – there is a great appetite from the market to build and develop those types of games. They're a market catalyst." To this end, the company has just welcomed Mike Nichols. "He was executive producer for Project Natal at Microsoft, and joined us as general manager," confirms Tombroff. "That shows a commitment to be at the centre of the videogames market."

Gesture-based gaming was one of the key themes of E3 2010, and Softkinetic appears fully committed to the initiative. There's the tangible – connect a 3D camera to a USB port and you can already use Softkinetic's output on a PC – and the ethereal on the company's radar. Regarding the latter, Tombroff will only hint: "There will also be the emergence of new platforms, not from just Sony, Nintendo and Microsoft, bringing gesture-based gaming to a specific geographic market. We're working on one, but unfortunately I can't name it at the moment."



Time and space

There are three techniques behind 3D image sensors, and Tombroff has a working knowledge of them all. "The first were called stereoscopic cameras, where two lenses imitate the human eyes. This is very sensitive and has not been selected by any of the recent videogame or TV manufacturers."

The second is 'structured light', the format Microsoft's Kinect is using. "That projects a laser grid in space, with another sensor that looks at that and recalculates the distance." The hardware then conceptualises the user in relation to the camera.

The third category is 'time of flight' which, as Tombroff describes it, is similar in approach to sonar. "The camera projects infra-red light in the scene which bounces back to the camera, where it calculates the time and the distance it travelled."

Studio profile

Like Top Trumps, but for game dev

■ **NAME:** RedGate Games Co Ltd (a subsidiary of Gamania Digital Entertainment Co Ltd)

■ **DATE FOUNDED:** 2009

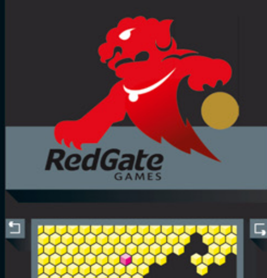
■ **NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES:** 69

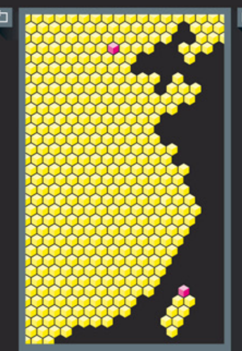
■ **KEY STAFF:** Jacky Chu (COO)





Hero: 108 Online is based on the animated series Hero: 108, which currently airs on Cartoon Network and chronicles conflicts between animals and humans





■ **LOCATION:** Taipei, Taiwan and Beijing, China

■ **CURRENT PROJECTS:** *Hero: 108 Online*, *Project Core*

■ **ABOUT THE STUDIO**

"RedGate Games is the proud combination of the best from Gamania's R&D and game design teams in Beijing, paving the way for Gamania's entry into the international market with its MMOG *Hero: 108 Online* and the Unreal Engine 3-based *Project Core*.

"'Do anything that others don't dare to do'" is RedGate Games' motto. The developer dared to take the emotional aspect of a console game and immerse it in an online game world, creating the purest form of fun and adventure experienced at the same time. Starting with *Hero: 108 Online*, the first ever collaboration between a cartoon and an online game, RedGate Games will bring the world its vision: creating simple, pure fun for everyone to enjoy."





Hero: 108 Online is free to play and features guilds, raids and other MMOG staples. In a break from genre tradition, however, it is played entirely via keyboard control


Just a leisurely walk home? Or a last minute attack in the World Cup final?
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Kochavi
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03
Rob



BY CLINT HOCKING

SOMETHING FROM (CLICK) NOTHING Convergence culture

Part one: Dealing with the dirty word

From a design perspective, 'convergence' is a dirty word. Convergence is a business concept that aims to bring about an overlap in otherwise diverse audiences by leveraging IP across games, film, toys, books and comics, TV or other forms of entertainment.

In the game industry, the traditional approach to convergence finds second-tier publishers floating themselves on licensing deals for third-rate movies that yield fourth-rate games. These still outsell some of the best titles because uninspired marketing twits would rather trick Wal-Mart-shopping soccer moms into buying something crappy than attempt to nurture a growing need for a new entertainment medium that enriches us, moves us and challenges the way we experience the world.

I find this approach cynical and exploitative. But contrary to rumours of my anti-capitalist tendencies, I am actually in favour of responsible transmedia leveraging of IP, and not simply because it's profitable. As the cultural chasms between generations widen and deepen, and as the mountains of inequity separating the richest and poorest steepen, I believe that well-crafted transmedia properties have a unique capacity to foster convergence; weaving together the experiences of differing peoples to form the very fabric of our culture.

But the reality of transmedia convergence is that we have, up to now, been mostly incapable of even making good crossplatform ports of our best gaming experiences. *Modern Warfare* rocks on the current home consoles – not so much on iPhone and DS. With this being the case, is it any surprise that attempts to port those experiences across to other media have failed so miserably?

Every time anyone has tried to create a rich transmedia IP to appeal to diverse audiences, they have failed in at least one major domain. Star Wars, Harry Potter and Clancy come to mind as our best successes. Star Wars novels never appealed to a broader audience than existing Star Wars fans, *Harry Potter* contributed little of value to the game space, and Clancy never brought anything to the table that was appealing to kids or families (though that's probably a wise omission). That said, the Star Wars novels and the *Potter* games were financial successes – and that's the point I'm trying to make. Because the expected margins are great and no investment in quality is required, creativity is sucked out by business and marketing execs before these transmedia properties even have a chance to be good.

> "I for one am tired of playing the cowering Carpathian peasant; they have the internet in Transylvania now too, you know"

So what's to be done? As long as 'convergence' remains a rallying cry on Wall Street, and investors freely offer up their vaults as financial safe-havens to the vampires of culture, I fear we'll never see the dawn. But I for one am tired of playing the cowering Carpathian peasant; they have the internet in Transylvania now too, you know. And Xbox and Wi-Fi and iPad. I think it's high time we got a mob together, and armed with Wii Remotes, iPhones and PSPs in place of torches and pitchforks, we'll drag those bloodsuckers out into the streets and stake them to the ground. And if our mob is made up of people who genuinely care about games as a medium of human expression, then what shall be the sharpened stick upon whose point we stake our bloody claim?

I say we use the word convergence itself, hacking it like a turret in *BioShock* to turn it to our own purpose. If we stop talking about convergence in the cold business terms that have drained the life from so many games (and developers, and gamers) and start talking about it in design terms, we not only have a dangerous new weapon of our own, but we have appropriated one of the more dangerous weapons that's been fielded against us.

This new convergence will be the topic of this series of columns. In the coming months, I'm going to talk about how new and changing paradigms of design, play, interaction, technology and economics are reshaping the games we play, the people who play them and the industry that makes them. This new convergence is not a transmedia convergence, but rather an intramedia convergence. It's a bottom-up convergence given life by the plethora of smartphones and tablets we carry into battle, and enabled by ubiquitous Wi-Fi, connected consoles, cellular data networks and a new overhanging Cloud that miraculously doesn't block the sun.

This is the convergence I believe we should be talking about and working towards. It's a convergence that starts by getting our own house in order, and by bringing diverging audiences of players together. For too long, casual gamers, hardcore gamers, bite-sized gamers and mobile gamers have been in separate worlds. Until we can bring them together and unite them around a common experience – custom to each platform, but ultimately connected – is there any reason to imagine we can fill a movie theatre with people who don't give a shit about games to begin with?

Clint Hocking was creative director of Far Cry 2*, and is now an independent designer. He blogs at www.clicknothing.com*



HI, I'M RANDY Videogame design, etc

The zen of emergence

BY RANDY SMITH

The spirit of emergence is unpredictability. The player will wind up in situations they did not expect. They will find solutions you did not foresee. This will break your design, unless the design is too flexible to be broken. The situations may seem too harsh, the solutions too degenerate, but the player has had as much a hand in creating them as you have. To support emergence is to empower co-authorship, to reach towards the interactive medium's highest calling. If unpredictability is incompatible with your design, do not pursue emergence.

Channels are the veins and heart of emergence. Suppose a glowing alien plant is to awaken a bird creature by shining light on it. Rather than one-to-one, this connection should be many-to-many. The plant should not communicate with the bird directly. Instead, create a channel called Light which is agnostic about who broadcasts on it and who listens for it. The plant activates the Light channel, as does the player's torch, which means an accidentally dropped torch might also wake up the bird. And just as the bird listens for Light, so does the firefly creature, which means that even though you intended the player to attract fireflies with their torch, a glowing plant will do the same. A clever player will use this to their advantage.

Emergence is measured by the quantity and length of causal chains. Always ask yourself, "Then what happens?" or "What else?" A bird has died. Then what happens? It should not disappear from the spectrum of play. Instead its corpse becomes potential food for scavenger creatures, connected by a DeadMeat channel. What else? Someone else should listen on the DeadMeat channel. Perhaps drifting spores plant themselves in the corpse. Then what happens? If they grow to maturity before the corpse is consumed by scavengers, they glow, activating the Light channel. A good reason to stop asking is because you've closed the loop.

Physics systems make excellent channels. An object has properties of mass, velocity, elasticity and so on which dictate its behaviour, and two objects can transfer those properties between each other via physical interactions, all in a highly visible way. Physical interactions are very complicated, but the player has spent their life absorbing those patterns and rules. Equally familiar concepts include Fire, Water, and Traffic. Using them effectively liberates you from some of the burden of educating the player about the behaviours and connections of your gameworld.

> "Designing a level to support emergence is like cooking a stew. Toss in ingredients until you get a flavour you like"

Side effects are the hallmark of emergence, but this is not to be confused with chain reactions. Bullets that trigger red barrels that trigger ever bigger explosions largely just amplify the original stimulus. Emergence is asymmetric, L-shaped like the path of a knight. For every two steps taken in a direction, take one orthogonal step. When thrown into water, strange alien rocks explode with a Physics impulse, but also generate lots of Heat. Heat is needed to hatch the bird eggs, but Heat also reduces the player's shield resource. What happens next? A depleted shield causes the computer to beep, activating the Noise channel. What else? A causal chain of L-shaped connections cannot proceed in a straight line, so the player will generate side effects on the path toward their goal.

Avoid prejudice regarding whether an emergent behaviour is a challenge for the player to accommodate or a tool for the player to make use of. Allow ambiguity to reign over whether it is good or bad, useful or dangerous. The glowing plants spit seeds that might damage an unsuspecting player, or the player might have triggered this on purpose to down a bird creature. Scavenger bugs secrete an oil slick that catches on Fire when combined with Heat. Does the player want this to happen or not? The answer should always be: it depends. It depends on what the player is trying to accomplish, at which types of gameplay they are proficient, what the current situation is, and so forth.

To the player, you must offer control in a fine balance. Too little and they are at the mercy of a capricious simulation. Too much and they will bypass emergence. The ideal is indirect control through the channels. The player throws an exploding rock, but whether it hits the target depends on the player's aim and Physics. Instead of starting a fire as intended, it might strike a bird in mid-air, or its explosion might cause a boulder to tumble downhill – emergent reactions that would not occur if the player could directly apply the rock to the oil slick.

These systems do not create emergence. They create a cast of objects that can be placed in levels like mousetraps waiting to be sprung. Place them within proximity to spring each other, where the notion of 'proximity' varies with your specific design. Do not lay them out linearly. Designing a level to support emergence is like cooking a stew. Toss in ingredients until you get a flavour you like. The last ingredient added is the player, who upon triggering these objects and systems creates emergence. Possibly.

Randy Smith is the co-owner of Tiger Style, whose first game, Spider, is available now for iPhone and iPod Touch




BY STEVEN POOLE

TRIGGER HAPPY Shoot first, ask questions later

Rosebud was his horse

What is the Citizen Kane of videogames? In the constantly churned field of gamer chat, this is a zombie question: one you thought was righteously killed long ago, but that keeps popping up anew, shambling around the internet dripping gobbets of putrefying flesh, with a terrifying void where its higher intellectual functions used to be. Is it actually credible, for a start, that all these people should adore Citizen Kane so much? Do they have walls fully papered with Citizen Kane posters? Do they watch it on Blu-ray every month after lighting candles and putting on their special socks, embroidered at the ankles with twin likenesses of Orson Welles's chubby face? Is the sound of a dying man wheezing "Rosebud" what they use as a ringtone on the 'smart' phones they moaningly stroke on public transport?

> You have to embrace embarrassingly low standards to maintain any kind of competitive comparison with film

No; presumably the incantation of this film's name has just become anxious shorthand for something like "a medium-defining masterpiece". So we could ask, if you prefer: what is the Battleship Potemkin of videogames? Or: what is the Seventh Seal of videogames?

But why stop there, since we are already having so much fun? It must be equally fascinating to ask other cross-medium questions. I hereby demand to know: what is the Wire of popular song? What is the Paradise Lost of television? What is the Smells Like Teen Spirit of classical ballet? What is the Love's Labour's Lost of pottery?

Perhaps you think I am being facetious. After all, most earthenware bowls are not trying to be complex romantic comedies, and most classical ballerinas are not straining to produce deafening grunge. But an awful lot of videogames are trying to be films, which is doubtless why the Citizen-Kane-of-games trope has arisen. It has come about because of a reinforced mistake: a mistake made by videogame designers, and then repeated by their uncritical fans as well as their ignorant critics.

In other words, we're all in this together, as George Osborne would put it in his carefully drilled Estuary-inflected sneer (though we don't all have a multimillion-pound wallpaper fortune to fall back on). As I write, for example, a normally sceptical technology site has just creamed its metaphorical elasticated cargo pants over *Red Dead Redemption*, gibbering: "The storytelling rivals cinema."

Well, sure, *Redemption* is a teensy bit like the longest and most boring western ever made, except with really ugly digital faces and a psychopathically repetitive emphasis on murdering furry animals. Yet, for all its Morricone-esque whistling and the no-doubt-tremendous efforts of the 'Senior Ambient Designers' namechecked in the world's most tedious credits sequence, to pretend it rivals cinema is to insult even the most workmanlike sub-Leone or sub-Ford genre movie.

Crucially, in *Redemption* there is no flow, no natural back-and-forth, to the dialogue. As I was playing it, the chasms of time that yawned between one character's line and the other character's response forced me to spend what seemed like subjective eternities contemplating the cruel meaninglessness of the cosmos. I was pushed further into melancholy when I learned that I could now 'purchase and rent properties', because being a pretend buy-to-let entrepreneur is apparently still so enticing even in these straitened economic times. Eventually I was driven to such depths of nihilistic despair that I shot and skinned my own horse. When I then wistfully whistled for my freshly assassinated equine friend, an entirely different horse turned up to take his place, not turning up a nostril at the flayed corpse still steaming on the ground.

The naturalistic illusion is still so easy to break in such games – whether it is Marston's acute case of Slippy Feet Syndrome; the absurdly belated and stilted exchanges that happen when you bump into someone; a rabbit stuck in a fence, still cycling through its running animation; or the fact that early on in *Redemption*, a stranger passed a plank of wood right through my legs – that you have to embrace embarrassingly low standards to maintain any kind of competitive comparison with film in the representation and storytelling stakes. And if you are willing to slum it aesthetically in this way, then you can hardly complain when some outsider takes one look and snorts: "Well, if this is the Citizen Kane of videogames, it's just as I thought: they're all rubbish."

The Kane comparison, in sum, is not only stupid but actively harmful, insofar as it might prompt more developers to try to 'make a Citizen Kane' rather than making a really good videogame (parts of which are still visible, if sadistically scattered by miles of padding and great log-mountains of wooden speech-acts, in *Red Dead Redemption* itself). The right way to handle someone posing the Kane question, of course, is to respond, all innocence: what is the *Tetris* of cinema?

Steven Poole is the author of Trigger Happy: The Inner Life Of Videogames. Visit him online at stevenpoole.net





PLAYING IN THE DARK ...because people refuse to see

The disc is not enough

Back in my journalist days, it was interesting to see which industry figures would complain about used game sales. A game producer I've become friends with is not only virulently opposed to the practice, he also believes that it's the ultimate betrayal for retailers like GameStop to take marketing dollars from publishers with one hand while steering consumers towards used games with the other. The CEO of a major publisher once told me that he wasn't opposed to used games, but rather what he perceived as the low trade-in value that GameStop offered, resulting in large profit margins for the retailer and nothing to the publisher or the development team. And several game developers I know are sanguine about the whole thing, seeing it from the points of view of both the civilian game fans they used to be, trying to stretch each dollar as far as it could go, and that of the industry veterans they've become, knowing that each dollar in used game sales is a dollar that they and their peers may be denied.

It's equally interesting to contrast this hostility towards used sales with the efforts game publishers have made to increase the average selling price of their titles. From plastic instruments to multiple special editions of games, publishers have left no stone unturned when it comes to extracting money from consumers. Things like night-vision goggles aside, the seeds for this strategy were sown in the previous generation of consoles, when sizable numbers of gamers would pay the $10 extra for a 'special edition' version with some trinket or bonus thrown in. So when the first wave of Xbox 360 titles debuted at $60, I wasn't surprised given the clearly demonstrated willingness of gamers to pay an extra $10.

However, in fairness to publishers and developers, the average selling price of games has not kept place with inflation. During the era of the 16bit console, it wasn't uncommon to spend $70 or more for a cartridge. So in that sense, today's pricing is a discount even if it doesn't always feel much like it. But when you factor in the rising cost of game development, it's easy to see why publishers are looking at a number of ways to recoup and ultimately profit from their investment.

This is where EA's Project Ten Dollar comes in. I first noticed it in an *NBA Live* game that had been sent to me while I was still writing for Newsweek. Rather than immediately jump online, I had to enter a code that would let me access the game's online features. But if for some reason I hadn't been in possession of the code, I would have to pay an additional fee in order to do so. And even though many of the ramifications of this were immediately clear, I wasn't perturbed by it in the slightest. After all, I was the first 'purchaser' of the game; I was in possession of the required code. And that's the first key to a strategy like Project Ten Dollar: to drive a wedge between people who buy their games new and those who buy them used by maintaining (or increasing) the value of the game at first sale and driving down the value of the game for any subsequent purchasers.

This practice began to make its way into other EA titles like *Dragon Age*, *Mass Effect* and *Battlefield: Bad Company 2*, sweetened with the carrot of free bonus content. THQ followed suit with its UFC-licenced game. Meanwhile, executives at other publishers, like Ubisoft, have been indicating their interest in establishing similar initiatives at their own companies. And on the surface, it looks like a win for all concerned, with additional content (like the Flashback Map Pack for *Gears Of War 2*) to the first purchaser that, presumably, he or she would not have otherwise received.

The challenge with these initiatives, however, is that the redeem-code-for-multiplayer-and-bonus-content is a blunt instrument with which to beat back used game retailers. If I want to, say, lend my copy of *UFC Unlimited* to a friend, he or she must purchase a new code in order to play multiplayer. That hardly seems fair. And this doesn't even cover digital distribution, which often fails to allow any sharing options in its default state.

In my opinion, publishers should approach this entire issue with more carrot and less stick. Rather than look at their consumer as someone who just wants to blaze through the game as quickly as possible and sell it for GameStop dollars, they should look at their customers as carriers who could infect other gamers with enthusiasm for the title in question, which could in turn lead to increased sales.

If word of mouth is the biggest driver of sales, why not give anyone who completes the game's campaign the ability to unlock additional codes that they can share with their friends to access an extended campaign co-op demo? Or 48 hours of access to multiplayer? The connected world we live in doesn't just let publishers solve perceived problems, it creates intriguing opportunities that smart publishers should take advantage of in order to turn gamers into allies rather than adversaries.

> "Publishers should look at their customers as carriers who could infect other gamers with enthusiasm for the title in question"

N'Gai Croal is a writer and videogame design consultant. You can follow him online at ncroal.tumblr.com







SATURDAY 24 JULY 2010		SUNDAY 25 JULY 2010

MAIN STAGE

Saturday 24 July 2010





Heaven & Hell
A Tribute to Ronnie James Dio
FOREIGNER
GARY MOORE
THE UNION

Sunday 25 July 2010



JOE ELLIOTT
& VERY SPECIAL GUEST
IAN HUNTER
DOWN 'N' OUTZ
JOE BONAMASSA
BACHMAN & TURNER
UFO • THE QUIREBOYS

HAMMER STAGE

Saturday 24 July 2010



SAXON
CATHEDRAL • HAMMERFALL
ORANGE GOBLIN
BLACK SPIDERS • NEW DEVICE

Sunday 25 July 2010

Down
Opeth
CLUTCH
HIGH ON FIRE
AUDREY HORNE • LETHARGY

PROG STAGE

Saturday 24 July 2010

TRANSATLANTIC
ASIA
DWEEZIL ZAPPA
BIG ELF • FOCUS
PENDRAGON
TOUCHSTONE

Sunday 25 July 2010

marillion
ARGENT
URIAH HEEP
(PERFORMING DEMONS & WIZARDS)
MAGNUM • STEVE HACKETT
MARTIN TURNER'S WISHBONE ASH
(PERFORMING ARGUS)
THE REASONING

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Inbox



Issue 216

ONLINE OFFLINE

Choice cuts from Edge Online's discussion forum
forum.edge-online.co.uk

Topic: Red Dead Redemption

Interesting glitch on a bounty hunter mission, where I stumbled across someone riding their horse *in* the ground – only the rider's head and torso were visible, as well the horse's head.
Skondo

I haven't had that many glitches playing the game, but towards the end I had one excellent glitch where I was chased by buffalo riding horses while trying to get a bounty back to Blackwater. What made it extra funny was that they were actually sitting upright in the saddles with pistols drawn. Mood-breaking, but hilarious.
Some_Guy

In one mission in which I was escorting a character across the desert, my guide was shot off his horse. Rather than jumping back on, he ran the whole way to the end. It was stupidly hilarious.
EFifty

To reprise the question people sometimes ask about theatre – "Where are all the right-wing plays?" – you could ask the same question in reverse for another area of entertainment: "Where are all the left-wing videogames?" Certainly a progressive perspective on global issues seems to elude so many in the videogames industry that – at least in terms of high-profile releases, as you alluded to in your excellent Hype editorial (**E**215) – war in its various guises has become so endemic as a theme for developers that you'd assume that the industry was being run by a cabal of teenage boys with a predilection for rampaging massacres and a commitment to only ever deliver narrative from the perspective of western military organisations.

It's depressing to hear Epic's Mike Capps having no qualms at all about *Gears Of War* being used as a tool for recruiting Americans to the military ("that was the goal"), seemingly not troubled by or even prepared to acknowledge the fact that such recruitment tends to come predominantly from poor young men, often from the south, who are then sent off to fight wars with questionable legitimacy, at great human cost to themselves, their families and, arguably, the world at large.

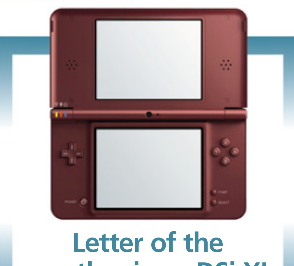
Fair enough, the army might need to recruit, but should a piece of entertainment aimed at a certain demographic be used to do that? It's no more satisfactory for Atomic Games president Peter Tamte to say that "politics is something for the politicians to worry about" than it was for the handful of bands who played at Sun City [during apartheid] in the '80s to justify their appearances with the same detached logic.

As the ability to deliver more complex decision-making in games develops, so does the ability to graphically and thematically represent human conflict in a way that becomes far more visually representative of the genre to the outside observer – *Medal Of Honor* isn't *Space Invaders* – and if the industry is going to reach out to the global population as a whole then it needs to start thinking about issues with more responsibility. The games industry isn't a monolithic, one-dimensional entity and it's very little to do with censorship, but very much more to do with balance and with publishers having more confidence to push developers on issues of political sensitivity. It would do them no harm at all and only speed up the development of the industry so it becomes genuinely representative of the cultures and cross spectrum of society that any mature genre should rightly attempt to reflect.

Mark Whitfield

If the games industry is going to reach out to the global population as a whole, then it needs to start thinking about issues with more responsibility

A gun is the perfect one-click solution to generating high drama; no wonder it's taken hold in gaming as a primary means of expression. But the degree to which games have been subsumed by a cross-media fetishisation of violence is troubling – something we'll address in depth in a coming issue.



Letter of the month wins a DSi XL

Sure, most of us were probably never going to install PS3 Linux (**E**214), but that can't be the point here – or it shouldn't be. Sony's move to force owners of older PS3s to remove OtherOS, a feature they'd purchased, via an update, is radical and a precedent for potential future post-purchase meddling that should be of interest to the gaming community at large.

Whatever you thought of OtherOS – and it's clear most people thought it a useful gimmick at best – it was apparently OK for Sony to deny its customers online gaming unless they threw away something they'd bought. And Sony's not the only publisher playing fast and loose with traditional concepts of ownership, as **Edge** has previously reported (**E**200): in an ongoing legal dispute against developers of a *World Of Warcraft* bot, Blizzard is arguing that buying a piece of software actually only amounts to buying a license to use it under terms prescribed by the publisher. Another high-profile example is a case brought by Autodesk, in which it claimed (with similar reasoning) that purchasers of its software infringed a licensing agreement when they tried to sell that software secondhand.

Luckily, Autodesk's claim was rejected, but the potential implications



this kind of boundary-pushing has for the games market are significant. (Consider also Sony's and EA's recent introduction of an additional fee for buyers of secondhand copies of online games: was online play part of the original purchase or not? It isn't clear.)

There's obviously something fishy about this, but what exactly? Courts have long rejected attempts by vendors to impose after-sale restrictions or undesirable alterations. The only difference now, it seems, is that vendors of networked software can readily impose post-sale restrictions over the internet. With future distribution likely to be via some mix of digital marketplace and live streaming, the notion of software ownership and the rights that come with it become even less clear cut.

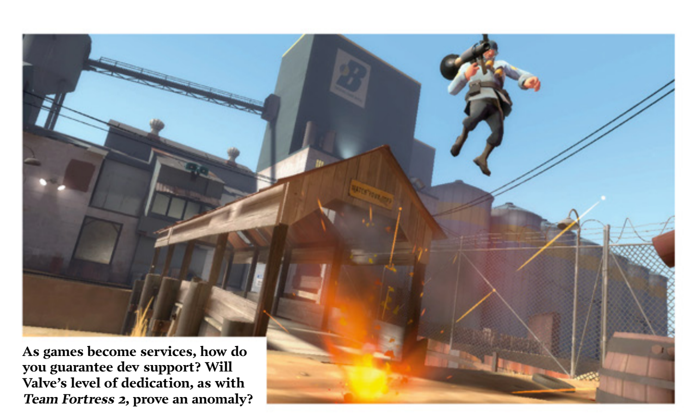
Before embracing this heady future of ubiquitous and instantly accessible gaming, shouldn't we take publishers' recent behaviour a bit more seriously?

Before embracing this heady future of ubiquitous and instantly accessible gaming, shouldn't we take publishers' recent behaviour a bit more seriously? I for one won't relish a future in which I have few guarantees that, once paid for, my cherished gaming experiences will remain unchanged.
Billy P

Jack Tretton was careful to say that the DLC and other benefits of PlayStation Plus would be available "for the duration of your subscription". Software is a service now – you're paying for access, not for the data itself. This can be used to conceal chicanery, but the flipside is that developers will also have to battle for your ongoing loyalty with post-release care. Gamers and the press need to be astute in comparing devs' efforts in this regard before the free market can take care of itself. Hopefully, Nintendo's plans for 3DS won't adversely affect your continued ownership of the DSi XL that's on its way.

As a gamer in his 30s, I find it alarming how many games arrogantly demand tens of hours of time be devoted to them. Developers must realise that these multi-hour monsters place themselves in direct competition with the best of other mediums. For example, The Wire's deeply layered exploration of the Baltimore drug trade earns it a lengthy run time. It also rewards my 50-plus hours of attention far more than a game of comparable length would.

Games should continue to present players with interesting mechanics, and spin escapist narratives to embellish their playing fields. But please, don't drip-feed these elements over a time span that's more the result of a marketing department bullet point than genuine artistic necessity.
Rob Cook


As games become services, how do you guarantee dev support? Will Valve's level of dedication, as with *Team Fortress 2*, prove an anomaly?


Topic: E3 2010
Best:
1) 3DS
2) *GT5* dated
3) Gabe

Worst:
1) Kinect
1) Move
3) Myself for watching all 5+ hours of these shows. WTF is wrong with me?
Frisbee

I just saw the trailer for the new *Donkey Kong Country* and I want it NOW. Takes me back to when I was 10. It looks hugely fun to play.
Neutral-fanboy

I've put a deposit down on a new 360. Why? Because I was giddy with excitement at the new-looking sexy box. I want it for the following reasons:
It's sexier.
It's new.
It's quieter.
It has an HDMI connection.
I thought it was a new, updated, faster, overhauled machine. My question: is it a significant enough of a development of the current model to warrant a purchase or am I being duped?
Fluffyducky

Waving your arms around to pause and rewind a film, and talking to your console, is a gimmick and not a step forward at all.
jmichaelwood

I wonder if you can give your Xbox a personalised name, like Marjorie or Dennis, for example. Marjorie, record!
Kow

Xbox, play.
Xbox, pause.
Xbox, rewind.
Xbox, stop.
Xbox, I'm lonely.
Eregol


What separates a clever metagame from filler content? Do *Modern Warfare 2*'s ranks and unlocks obscure the joys of the game beneath?

Today, I had a moment of clarity with *Modern Warfare 2* – I had, again, allowed my enjoyment of gaming to be replaced with an all-consuming pursuance of in-game Achievements.

As I realised how focused I had become on the ends and not the means, I couldn't help but feel a sense of guilt for neglecting the other titles I own (and could own, had I not been so immersed in playing this one game). As you gain XP and your rank increases, your avatar develops skills and unlocks abilities – but for the player looking to 'better' themselves, the next level is never enough.

I quit *WOW* when I realised that my pleasure in playing peaked just after a level-up, when I got to use a new weapon or equip a new item. This would soon be replaced by a dull analysis of what I would need to do in order to reach the next level quickly – and then the grinding would commence.

Now, the same thing has happened in *MW2*. After the brief excitement of a level-up and the equipping of a new weapon or title, I turn to the stats – number-crunching to pair up weapons and perks to create big XP boosts. After that, the matches are all about the numbers; winning and losing are pushed to the back of my mind.

Clearly, this is how these games command our attention, and retain such huge player-bases. But I do worry that by including so much 'challenge content', they have removed the simple pleasure of just playing a game for its own sake. The existence of such elaborate reward systems means I'm spending more time in the barracks than I am in the field. Perhaps it's just

Continued

my problem – though I suspect that I'm not alone. I can't deny that I still find *MW2* great fun to play, but I think I'm ready to move on now.

It may be time to hang up my M16 alongside my boomstick.
Liam Birch

One man's metagame is another's makework, it seems. The **Edge** office isn't exactly unified on the issue: some of us have a weakness for grinding, while others find any deferral of progress or any dilution of the core experience a profound bore. Does this indicate a widening split among gamers' tastes? Since the days when games were regularly ranked by 'longevity', has the mood changed among gamers as a whole?

I've been playing *Alan Wake* of an evening for the past week or so, and have mixed feelings about it. Why oh why did the developers feel the need to include the now inevitable 'collectibles', and do so at ridiculous points in the maps? All they do is spoil the atmosphere that Remedy worked so hard to establish.

As a plot device, the discovery of the missing pages from the manuscript works brilliantly, either pre-empting what's coming next or explaining what's already happened. But, as you point out in your review, having to pause the game in order to read them really breaks the narrative.

Yet it's the other collectibles that I can't fathom, and the thermos flasks and TV shows in particular. In the context of the narrative – the unique selling point of the game – they make no sense. Worse still, they're often placed so that collecting them breaks the spell cast by the game. Amazingly, The Darkness, which has shown an unrelenting desire to kill Wake, waits patiently for him to finish watching an episode of Night Springs. Somewhere, a number at the end of a line of code increases by one.

For *Alan Wake*, a game that's trying to market itself as an 'adult' psychological thriller, isn't this incongruous? Isn't it time for 'proper' videogames like this to stop worrying about being games, and focus instead on creating the thing all truly good forms of entertainment produce – suspension of disbelief?
Simon Brindle

And that's makework at its absolute worst: collectibles that don't serve to advance the game mechanically, and diminish it narratively.

Topic: DS, DSL, DSI, DSXL...? 3DS!

I'd be more excited if it had two sticks. After the problems the PSP has had, it seems daft having only one again.
Matt 82

I suppose if you really like FPSes that would be a problem. I've gone off them, so I'm not bothered. And Nintendo have never had much of an FPS presence on their systems, and they seem to do alright, so I don't think they're going to be bothered either.
AJ-D

There's the odd other game that would've benefited too; *Katamari* springs to mind. At the end of the day, it'd be nice to have them just as much as it's nice having them on the console controllers.
jmichaelwood

You'll have the analogue stick for your left hand and the stylus for pointy pointy stuff on the right, same as the Wii.
EvilRedEye

As Nintendo are riding a wave of popularity, it's in the interests of the media to be positive about 3DS. That'll come back to bite you if you overlook faults too readily.

Watching films on a piddly screen? No, thanks. I'm old enough to remember the kids in school who got laughed at for having pocket TVs. Those were the height of cool for a couple of years until the price fell. Then more people bought them and came to realise that – beyond the novelty – the reality was disappointing.

Nintendo are in a corner, to be fair. A bigger off-the-shelf screen isn't economically viable. But a new handheld without something new wouldn't be a very good idea at all. PSP2 only needs more power, better specs. That's generally what appeals to PSP owners. Nintendo dug their own hole with the stylus. You just can't make technology happen every few years, we've largely passed through that era of rapid development.

The 3DS will probably sell plenty at a keen price point, though. However, I think there's danger if its buyers feel duped in any way en masse.
Escape



Gotta catch 'em all? Simon Brindle thinks that *Alan Wake*'s collectible coffee flasks and TV episodes work against the game's drama

Is Nintendo seizing the initiative for the next generation? Despite the massive sales of consoles and games, the company has seemingly alienated gaming's core audience by producing consoles that are under-powered, and licensing games that are considered casual at best, shovelware at worst. Is change now in the air?

With recent articles on the internet citing developers' claims that the hardware for the 3DS is far more powerful than the Wii and closer to HD consoles such as the 360 and PS3 (it would have to be in order to power a 3D handheld), are we seeing Nintendo change its traditional strategy of mildly powerful but energy/cost-saving tech and entering into the realm of graphical heavy-hitters? Is a Wii HD next?

Playing devil's advocate for Nintendo, there is a legitimate and lucrative audience for its titles, and probably more innovation on the Wii than its rivals, which cling on to the over-subscribed favourite genres of the hardcore audience.

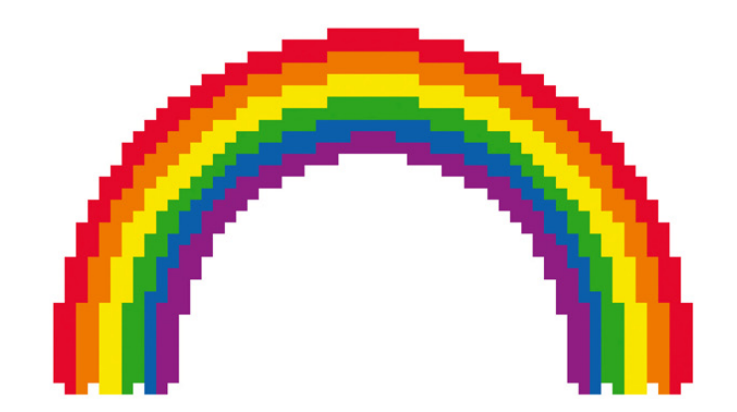
Nintendo has also broadened out the gaming demographic, ushering in more money, more interest from the mainstream and more experimentation from developers. Before *Phoenix Wright*, could visual novels – or even point-and-click adventures – have flourished on home/handheld consoles? Can you play *Halo* with the entire family, or would it be more fun for you to play *Mario Kart Wii* together? Furthermore, thanks to the hardware, Nintendo consoles always had a low price, which has created a low barrier for entry to the gaming market.

Perhaps criticism from gaming's core audience about poor graphics and online service have sparked Nintendo into life in an attempt to pacify its critics – the same critics who initially dismissed the control system for the Wii as a gimmick and who continue to purchase endless FPS clones.

Let's just hope the newfound technical power doesn't stop Nintendo innovating because they can license generic, frankly unoriginal and unenjoyable games such as *Modern Warfare* and *Battlefield 2: Bad Company* with their tired mechanics.
Jason Maher

Wii HD hardware exists at Nintendo HQ, but whether it ever comes to market is another thing. The good news is that, judging by the 3DS rumours we've heard since E3, the company doesn't seem likely to be giving up on innovation any time soon.

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Edge 218

on sale August 3

